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believability of memories that might otherwise appear 'untrue' constitute important political moves. It is by means of trauma theory, suggests Walker, that the correspondences between film, recollection and event can be traced correspondences which are arguably foregrounded by the feminist autobiographical documentaries she discusses

The concept of correspondence returns us, once more, to Thomas Elsaesser's proposals concerning the interpretative methods suggested by trauma theory. Elsaesser's contribution invites consideration of the developments trauma theory might prompt in theories of referentiality, hermeneutics and interpretation while acknowledging that trauma might become too handy a catch-all. In opening up a debate on trauma and Screen Studies, my hope is that scholars will ask what trauma can illuminate whilst simultaneously bearing in mind the shadow it may cast over other theories, concepts and ideas no less valuable.

Postmodernism as mourning work

THOMAS ELSAESSER

Trauma theory

My interest in this topic has arisen from a renewed – or perhaps belated – re-reading of some of the key filmmakers of the so-called New German Cinema, an art cinema about which I wrote a book not centred on the famous auteurs.[1] I had always meant to follow it up with a study on some of the major directors, in the context of their relation to Germany's Nazi past. Chapters of this project have been published over the years on H J Syberberg, Wim Wenders, Werner Herzog, Herbert Achternbusch and Harun Farocki, and I have also published a book-length essay on Rainer Werner Fassbinder[2] In the latter, especially, I was concerned with the marking of the relation between Germans and Jews by the always deferred 'mourning work' of the German nation for the victims of the Holocaust I resumed the topic of mourning work in another context. A made-for-TV movie from 1997 about the 'Hot Autumn' of 1977 and the Red Army Faction showed how major shifts of memory and reversals of

'110 per cent woman': the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical

NADINE WILLS

The Hollywood musical[1] is a genre filled with female bodies One of the main conventions of the musical is the way in which the multiple bodies of the chorus girls and female leads are repeatedly displayed as spectacle. However, despite the quantity of female bodies in the genre, the quality of their bodies – the 'type' of femininity they *embody* – is a very particularly prescribed kind of gender display The Hollywood musical is a genre that continually attempts to construct what I call a '110 per cent woman' a female body where sex and gender are so codependent, stereotyped and stylized that the final product is an excessively delineated femininity. It is this flaunting of femininity and this excessive gender performance that are essential to the generic iconography of the '110 per cent woman' in the musical The '110 per cent woman', then, is not simply an act of female agency but also a textual insistence on a particular kind of gender spectacle with attendant generic conventions Naturalizing gender difference by linking it to – or collapsing it into – sexual difference is part of the cultural work of Hollywood overall, and the Hollywood musical manages this process through very specific genre conventions. These performances of femininity are most clearly constructed through the convention of the crotch shot (moments where attention is drawn to the female genital area) instead of the heterosexual embrace The crotch shot, while continually being placed as a locus of desire, also functions to refocus courtship rites onto the female body and performances of femininity I will explore how the '110 per cent woman' type of femininity in the Hollywood musical can help to retheorize the genre when looked at from the perspective of the crotch shot.

2 This essay is based on assumptions about gender as distinct from sex, ideas about gender performativity (Judith Butler) and femininity as masquerade (Joan Riviere and Mary Ann Doane) See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of Sex'* (New York Routledge 1993) Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales Feminism Film Theory Psychoanalysis* (New York Routledge, 1991) Joan Riviere 'Womanliness as a masquerade', in Victor Burgin James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London Methuen 1986)

3 Laura Mulvey Afterthoughts on "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", inspired by King Vidor s *Duel in the Sun* in *Visual And Other Pleasures* (London Macmillan, 1989), p 29

4 Richard Dyer Entertainment and utopia in Rick Altman (ed) *Genre the Musical – a Reader* (New York Routledge & Kegan Paul 1981), p 177

5 Thomas Laqueur *Making Sex Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press 1990)

6 Anne Hollander *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York Viking Press 1978) p 104

7 For a brief summary of the history of women s underwear, see Elizabeth Wilson *Adorned in Dreams Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1985) p 102–7

The female body carries the heavy burden of femininity in the American musical genre Whatever its apparent narrative concerns, the musical begins and ends with the female body, and not with the heterosexual couple whose union, represented through their final embrace, is supposedly at its core. Thus, the musical is not only concerned with ideals of community represented by the heterosexual couple but more specifically with gender ideals represented by the female body The bodies of the female leads and chorus girls who fill the screen are not merely momentary voyeuristic attractions in a multifaceted display of heterosexual desire In this essay, I argue that musical films specifically attempt to naturalize the often unstable relationship between gender (femininity) and sex (female) through the convention of the crotch shot.[2] Furthermore, I want to reprivilege musical spectacle as a site of femininity rather than of heterosexuality. In the musical, female sexuality is only validated when woman's desire is displayed on her body as spectacle Finally, I assert that the crotch shot convention shifts theorizations of the overall structure of the musical genre from the static image of female 'to-be-looked-at-ness'[3] to the continual creation and recreation of the '110 per cent woman'

The crotch shot is a sociohistorical as well as a textual convention It is important briefly to contextualize the crotch shot within the Hollywood musical to show that it was not simply a generic innovation. As Richard Dyer points out, entertainment – and specifically the musical – visually attempts to resolve actual everyday problems.[4] One of the most significant 'problems' between 1933 and 1957 was women's entry into the workforce This entry into public space was paralleled in fashion: as women's social position changed so did their clothes. Consequently, new clothing helped define new understandings of the female body

Fashion theory and discourses on the social construction of the female body make it clear that the female crotch was at this time a relatively newly defined area on women's bodies In the eighteenth century, as understandings about the female reproductive system changed, female genitalia were located as the biological indicator of the difference between the sexes.[5] This emphasis on female genitalia as the site of difference refocused attention from the breasts and stomach to women's crotches.[6] Subsequent changes in fashion, most importantly the widespread introduction of underpants for women in the mid 1800s, gave female genitalia boundaries which created the crotch area

Underpants actually drew attention to the female crotch by selecting and covering an area of the body that had previously been obscure and unclothed.[7] Underpants, in other words, gave the crotch boundaries even as they afforded women new possibilities for movement that had previously been restricted by the danger of exposure Thus, the female crotch was the new locus of sexual

differentiation on the female body, one which made visible the
previously invisible Clothing the female crotch also produced an
idealized version of female genitalia: 'nicely' covered. the female
crotch became a socially presentable, sealed. hairless surface. As
women moved increasingly into public space, their previously
private, hidden and unclothed genitals became ever more public as
well As Anne Hollander points out: 'Immanent sexuality, best
expressed in a condition of stasis, was no longer the foundation of
feminine allure. The look of possible movement became a necessary
element in fashionable female beauty, and all women's clothing .
consistently incorporated visible legs and feet into the total female
image.'[8] I would go further and argue that the crotch display, rather
than simply the revelation of legs, was the apex of this new type of
femininity, based both physically and metaphorically on movement
New kinds of female clothing, most directly the introduction of
underwear for women, were a necessary condition for the crotch shot
as a cultural mode of female display. As women were able to engage
in a broader range of physical movements in public – and as their
clothes became less voluminous – the crotch display became a
possible mode of exposure. Such display can be read, then, as
metaphorically representing women's move from the private domestic
sphere into the public. the cinematic crotch shot analyzed in this
article could not exist without the very specific histories and contexts
that surrounded its incorporation into the Hollywood musical. Given
this, and precisely because the strategies of display in 1930s
Hollywood musicals are historically specific, the crotch shot has to
be seen both within the sociohistorical context of US concepts of
female dress and within broader generic and filmic discourses

8 Hollander *Seeing Through
Clothes* p 153

The crotch shot is not confined to the musical as a genre There are
many other instances of the use of this convention elsewhere in US
popular culture. for example in nickelodeon films. Although few of
these early films contain actual crotch shots, they do focus attention
to the region beneath women's skirts.[9] As Linda Mizejewski points
out: 'the camera enabled what no privileged theater seat could
possibly provide: the close-up of the dimpled knee'[10] – or, more
specifically, the crotch Consequently this potential for, rather than
actual, display problematizes women's presence in public so that 'in
rehearsing the boundaries of space, the films point to the way the
scandal of prostitution – its everyday visibility – could attach itself
to women more generally .. the public visibility of women could be
reason enough for mistaking them as sexually available'.[11] In early
nickelodeon films, the crotch shot is a signifier of the cultural
tensions that surrounded the changing presence of women in public
spaces just as it is more generally in the Hollywood musical The
exposure of a number of women in the nickelodeon films when their

9 For a discussion of modes of
exposure and men s fascination
with what lies beneath women s
skirts in early cinema see
Constance Balides 'Scenarios of
exposure in the practice of
everyday life women in the
cinema of attractions', *Screen*,
vol 34 no 1 (1993), pp 19–37
Robert C Allen *Horrible
Prettiness Burlesque and
American Culture* (Chapel Hill
NC University of North Carolina
Press 1991) pp 267–70
10 Linda Mizejewski *Ziegfeld Girl
Image and Icon in Culture and
Cinema* (Durham NC Duke
University Press 1999) p 139
11 Balides Scenarios of exposure
p 32

skirts are raised 'accidentally', or when men look up their petticoats, at least superficially resolves these women's problematic public existence by displaying the private and the biological beneath their skirts Seemingly 'accidental' or unrehearsed exposure in these early films allowed for sexual display without connotations of prostitution Rather than being a wilful exposure which would situate these women's bodies as public, the glimpsed regions underneath their skirts reference the private status of these women's bodies. Essentially, in these early film moments the crotch shot undermines women's presence in the public space of celluloid by reminding the viewer that beneath their skirts all women are the same. The crotch shot visually reduces these women from the social to the biological by reasserting their connection to private/domestic rather than public space. The crotch shot in the Hollywood musical, and indeed as a broader cultural mode of display, is surrounded by a whole set of similar discourses whose effect is to alleviate 'the scandal of prostitution' from besmirching the '110 per cent woman' [12]

The crotch shot is one of the central body techniques of the Hollywood musical genre. For the purposes of this essay, the crotch shot is defined as any particular moment when attention is drawn to the female genital area, either diegetically (by movement, costume, set, and so on) or technically (through cutting, framing or camera movement) Significantly, this definition shifts the presence of the crotch shot away from the imaginings of voyeuristic audiences and argues instead for its textual presence. No matter how it is presented – whether through women spreading their legs, through their skirts flying up to reveal their underwear, or through costumes which draw attention to the genital area – the crotch shot is part of the generic iconography of the US film musical However, the crotch shot is usually understood as an isolated convention confined to early 1930s musicals Rick Altman describes how dance director Busby Berkeley's use of the crotch shot in early 1930s backstage musicals produces very particular understandings of the female body:

> The famous track along their faces, so that each one can be seen in close-up, thus personalizing a seemingly impersonal line-up, is matched by an equally important track, this one undoing the individualization of the face-level track· I speak of the track between the legs, the voyeuristic movement which equates the eyes/camera with the phallus and which reduces each girl to the area between the abdomen and the knees .. the crotch shot is the semantic unit *par excellence* of the show musical, while the identification of the camera/audience as male and the show as female constitutes the very foundation of the show musical's syntax.[13]

For Altman, at the most basic structural level in the musical, camera and audience are positioned as the essential signifiers of masculinity,

12 For further discussions of the aesthetics of prostitution in relation to the 1930s musicals see Mizejewski *Ziegfeld Girl* pp 184–7 Pamela Robertson *Guilty Pleasures Feminist Camp from West to Madonna* (Durham, NC Duke University Press 1996) pp 79–84 Lyn Phelan *Artificial women and male subjectivity in 42nd Street* and *Bride of Frankenstein', Screen* vol 41 no 2 (2000) pp 165–6

13 Rick Altman *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington IN Indiana University Press 1987) pp 217 222

while the crotch shot is the essential signifier of femininity. In this reading of the crotch shot, the convention becomes purely a reductive one which supports the gender division structure of the musical

Lucy Fischer takes this point even further when she describes the crotch shot as a metaphoric rape in Berkeley's musical numbers, contending, again, that the camera signifies man and the crotch shot signifies woman She writes: 'as Molly Haskell finds the image of rape inscribed in the content of contemporary films, so one finds, in the style of Berkeley's "through-the-legs tracking shots", implications of the sexual act transposed to the rhetoric of camera technique'.[14] Altman's and Fischer's points are crucial in understanding the crotch-shot convention. The crotch shot certainly served a reductive purpose in the musical, embodying femininity as a universal female attribute to be put on display for male desire However, the crotch shot was neither simply a reductive signifier of femininity in the Hollywood musical nor was it limited to Berkeley's films or to 1930s musicals generally

Within the repertoire of ways in which women move their bodies and the ways female bodies are filmed and framed in the musical, the crotch shot is one of the most important conventions of musical generic iconography Conversely, it is also one of the most invisible because of the codes (both Production and cultural) and impulses that work to suppress its recognition There is a significant difference between crotch shots in early talkie musicals – those made before the introduction of the Production Code in 1934 – and those that come after this time.[15] There are a number of classic 'posed' crotch shots in films such as *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933), *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) and *Dames* (Ray Enright, 1934). Many – but certainly not all – of these 'posed' crotch shots were the perverse product of Busby Berkeley Berkeley's 'posed' crotch shots (in particular the 'tracking through the legs' shot, which is further defined below) are the ones most commonly commented upon. Gerald Mast, for example, notes

> There is a terrific energy in the inherent contradiction between his film images as purely 'musical' design and the sexual, social and moral implications of the images, which refuse to shed their signification Berkeley's studio bosses must have sensed the tensions and suggestions too Not only were Berkeley's sexual numbers expunged by 1935 but so was the inverted-V camera maneuver [the crotch shot] through the legs of show girls.[16]

Although Mast seems to contend that the crotch shot was censored after the introduction of the Production Code, I would argue not only that it was simply made less obvious, but also that it cannot be associated solely with Berkeley's work.

Essentially there are two types of crotch shot in the musical genre

14 Lucy Fischer *Shot/Countershot Film Tradition and Women s Cinema* (London British Film Institute, 1989) p 135

15 The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) was a form of movie industry self-regulation In an attempt to avoid federal intervention and in response to Catholic boycotts the MPPDA introduced the Production Code Administration (PCA) headed by Joseph Breen, in 1934 For more on the ways in which Hollywood negotiated censorship, see Ruth Vasey *The World According to Hollywood 1918–1939* (Exeter University of Exeter Press, 1997)

16 Gerald Mast *Can t Help Singin the American Musical on Stage and Screen* (Woodstock NY The Overlook Press 1987) p 137

LeRoy Prinz, Hollywood dance director, setting up a 'posed' crotch shot. From the collection of the Bill Douglas Centre, University of Exeter.

An 'accidental' crotch shot: Sonja Henie in *Thin Ice/Lovely to Look At* (Sidney Lanfield, 1937).

the 'posed' crotch shot most (in)famously used by Berkeley, and the 'accidental' crotch shot which succeeded it between 1935 and 1957. The main difference between the 'posed' and the 'accidental' crotch shot is that the former is much more obvious than the latter, even though both are equally contrived. The 'posed' crotch shot, blatantly explicit, derives its titillating power from the shame/shamelessness of the exposure ('I can't believe she's showing me her panties!'); while the apparently less contrived 'accidental' crotch shot is structured around the suspense of concealment/revelation ('Do we get

to see her panties? When do we get to see them?'). The difference between these two oppositions, shame/shamelessness and concealment/revelation lies in the women's own acknowledgement of the exposure.

The shamelessness of exposure in the 'posed' convention necessitates a series of discourses, most of which depend on exuberant display, in order to separate the 'posed' crotch shot from the 'scandal of prostitution' Indeed, the 'posed' crotch shot depends on a very specific type of shamelessness: a promiscuous *carpe diem* attitude where the happy smiles of the women who expose their crotches nullify the connotations of shame that public exposure might otherwise elicit Unlike the discomfort and outraged reactions of women who discover men looking up their skirts in early cinema,[17] the '110 per cent woman' exuberantly displays her body because her entire identity is located physically in her appearance. The 'posed' crotch shot is usually surrounded by a series of signifiers which position these women as celebrating their sexuality (accompanied by the distance of performance that distinguishes the display from solicitation) rather than advertising sexual availability

17 Balides, Scenarios of exposure
p 28

Berkeley's 'track between the legs' is one of the best examples of the 'posed' crotch shot. The 'I'm Young and Healthy' number in *42nd Street* is a classic instance of this medium shot (it is never a closeup), tracking between the legs with the camera aimed up towards the groins of the female chorus. The soundtrack is particularly important in the overall structuring of the crotch shot· Dick Powell sings the opening solo, a tribute to the vitality of lustful youth, and as the chorus enters for one of Berkeley's iconographic kaleidoscope shots, an instrumental interlude accompanies their abstract formations However, as the girls line up and prepare to spread their legs for the final climax of the crotch shot, the chorus begins to sing 'If I could hate yah, I'd stay away / But it ain't my nature, I'm full of Vitamin A / Say· I'm young and healthy, so let's be bold / In a year or two or three maybe we will be too old'. The 'gather ye rosebuds while ye may' sentiment of the lyrics that accompany the 'posed' crotch shot in this number shifts its sexual display from shameful to shameless While the scene's sexuality is clearly positioned as a response to ageing and the Depression, the crotch shot is also posited as the product of exuberant rather than calculated sexuality The exuberance of this number – Powell practically bounces around the stage, spurred on by his Vitamin A hormones – is clearly meant to exonerate its explicit sexuality: the 'posed' crotch shot exemplifies the sexual escapism of the early 1930s Hollywood musical

The necessary exuberance of the 'posed' crotch shot is similar to the contrived spontaneity of the 'accidental' crotch shot In *Born to Dance* (Roy Del Ruth, 1936), Eleanor Powell does a series of vigorous high-kicks to reveal her underwear while dancing for James

18 Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington IN Indiana University Press 1982) p viii

Stewart in Central Park Although this is seemingly a series of 'accidental' crotch shots, Powell's costume facilitates her exposure. As she moves, her dress's pleated skirt, made of light chiffon-like material, floats up around her muscular thighs as she vigorously and repeatedly raises her legs. Far from preventing exposure, Powell's costume is designed to assist crotch shots. This subtle costuming technique and the seeming spontaneity of her dance belies the crotch shot as a knowing exposure As Jane Feuer (among other musical genre theorists) mentions, 'musicals place a premium on an impression of spontaneity, group choreography and a naturalization of technique' [18] It is this contrived 'myth of spontaneity' and 'naturalization of technique' that enables the crotch shot to remain an insistent convention in the transition from the 'posed' to the 'accidental'.

The strategic camouflaging of 'posed' and 'accidental' crotch shots behind the emotional intensity of exuberance and spontaneity shifts attention away from the sexual artifice of the convention. For example, all the other signifiers in *42nd Street*'s 'I'm Young and Healthy' number – such as the costumes and the women's knowing smiles – make manifest the potential shamefulness and calculation of exposure of the 'posed' crotch shot. The chorus girls are clothed only in opaque leotards of a light, delicate material, and white fur tutus. In this instance, the very insubstantiality of their costumes makes the shame/shamelessness opposition of the crotch shot even more apparent. Not only do the chorus girls spread their legs for the camera, they do it while wearing very little Their near-nakedness would seem to uphold Fischer's description of the crotch shot as metaphoric rape as the only way to read this convention However, such a reading is complicated not only by the exuberant lyrics but also by the fact that the chorus girls seem to be consenting partners: their plastic smiles and acquiescent movements are surely intended to convey collusion with the camera. Thus, reading the crotch shot as a form of rape becomes more difficult because it is simultaneously disrupted by the libidinous glances of the chorus girls It is problematic to dismiss completely the agency of the female gaze in this situation if the crotch shot is a sex act, then surely it is a consensual one

In each of the 'posed' crotch shots, there is a period before or after the shot when the women performing it acknowledge their exposure. This is evident in another example of the 'posed' crotch shot, which takes place in the final water sequence of *Footlight Parade* when, from a low angle, an underwater camera shoots the bathing suit gussets of the chorus girls as they tread water. The camera is obviously positioned to enable a crotch shot that – seemingly anthropomorphically – leers up at the unsuspecting swimmers Yet in this same shot, the chorus girls dive down to smile at the camera, as if inviting the audience to take a closer look. On

one level, then, the 'posed' crotch shot is not solely voyeuristic.
Instead, the very knowingness of the exposed women at once
endorses it and shifts and complicates its meaning.

Conversely, the 'accidental' crotch shot denies its existence even
as it is displayed. In *Bright Eyes* (David Butler, 1934), an
'accidental' crotch shot takes place in the 'The Good Ship Lollipop'
number. Here, as men pass Shirley Temple around while she sings,
her short dress rides up to expose the panties beneath. Although
Temple keeps pulling down her dress, no attempt is made by the
men to keep it from riding up. Arguably, Temple's attempts at
modesty actually draw attention to the subsequent crotch shots. Here
the crotch shot depends upon the tension of concealment/revelation
and on Temple's apparent innocence. It is seemingly far removed
from the knowingness which accompanies the crotch shots in *42nd
Street* and *Footlight Parade*. Little girls' fashions during the 1930s
were often short dresses with matching underwear, yet Temple's
costume, significantly shorter than most everyday fashions at this
time, barely covers her panties. While the subsequent crotch shot is
supposedly accidental, the matching panties of Temple's costume
define her crotch as public rather than private. While many of
Temple's performances are particularly difficult to watch today

19 When Graham Greene pointed
this out in his review of *Wee
Willie Winkie* (John Ford 1937)
he was presented with a lawsuit
and the magazine which
published it went bankrupt See
Graham Greene *Mornings in the
Dark a Graham Greene Film
Reader* ed David Parkinson
(Manchester Carcanet Press
1993)

because of the constant construction of paedophilic desire placed on her body,[19] this desire also serves to reduce Temple to an essentialist position of universal female sameness where all female bodies are constructed in like democratic manner. More importantly, Temple's miniature performances of femininity were arguably the basis for her success Consequently, the crotch shot was an essential generic demonstration of her successful performance of the '110 per cent woman'.

Significantly, Shirley Temple's initial success was not as a skilful dancer but as a remarkably adept performer and parodist of gender in Jack Hays's *Baby Burlesk* series. In two of her most famous early performances, the four-year-old Temple can neither dance nor sing, but rather careens and screeches (to be fair she is only four years old in these short films). Instead, what Temple does perform, and what made her a star, is femininity. In *War Babies* (Robert M. Savini, 1932) Temple plays a French nightclub performer. She is dressed in a loose peasant blouse that falls off her shoulder, a nappy with a huge nappy pin decorated with a bow, a garter below her knee, Maryjane shoes and a rose in her hair Temple dances, swivelling her hips awkwardly side to side this, as well as highlighting her grownup display, also draws attention to the nappy pin fixed horizontally across her groin. Little boy soldiers dressed in nappies and helmets compete for her attention by plying her with lollipops Temple takes the sweets eagerly, placing each new lollipop in a big purse she holds in front of her nappy, again drawing attention to her groin area. Finally, two boy soldiers try to prove she loves them the most· in what can surely be read as a crotch shot by proxy, the first soldier produces the rose she has given him from her hair, and the other triumphantly pulls out her open nappy pin and licks it.

In another *Baby Burlesk* from the same year, *Kiddin' Hollywood* (Charles Lamont, 1932), Temple plays Morelegs Sweet Trick in a parody of Marlene Dietrich In this film, even her name draws attention to her crotch, with allusions to legs and sweets. Although the crotch shots in *War Babies* are 'accidental', in *Kiddin' Hollywood* the combination of 'posed' and 'accidental' crotch shots clearly caters to a textually constructed 'babysex' (my term) aesthetic Temple is a beauty pageant winner who eventually charms her way into acting. In a film-within-a-film Temple performs a musical number, during which she reaches down and grasps her nappy pin a number of times, parodying Dietrich's sexual performances and referring to her own status as '110 per cent woman' Finally. Temple is shown reproducing Dietrich's famous *Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930) pose In his article, 'On the naked thighs of Miss Dietrich', Peter Baxter points to

> that famous still of Lola leaning back, grasping her knees, on the stage of the Blue Angel. . It should be obvious by now that this

20 Peter Baxter On the naked
thighs of Miss Dietrich *Wide
Angle* vol 2 no 2 (1978) p 25

pose arrests the instant of fetishization, the instant before the
child's glimpse of the female genital organ.[20]

Baxter's psychoanalytic interpretation of this moment is especially
resonant when compared with Temple's imitation of it. Unlike the
shadowy area of Lola's crotch, Temple's crotch is clearly on display
and visible in the opening credits of the film-within-a-film The
controversial moment of exposure is not arrested here, but is on
display in a 'posed' crotch shot. Like everything else in Temple's
films, the crotch shot reminds the audience that this little girl is
enacting a perfect, if small-scale, feminine ideal. While obviously
perverse, Temple's poor singing and dancing in this film both
highlight and deny the 'posed' and 'accidental' crotch shots Her
successful gender performance here is necessitated by generic
convention, while also serving a 'babysex' aesthetic as a site for
male desire.

Despite the diegetic insistence on heterosexual focus and male
desire in the Hollywood musical, this construction of the '110 per
cent woman' also demands the continuous display of the crotch shot.
Even though the musical genre and its particular narrative romantic
structures seem to offer it as a voyeuristic convention, the crotch
shot helps construct the spectacular female body as an authentically
ideal feminine body. However, this authentic body often has to be
carefully negotiated While the 'posed' crotch shot openly
acknowledges its existence and thus involves only certain types of
ideal feminine bodies, the 'accidental' crotch shot – precisely
because it seems incidental – takes in a much broader group of
females, such as children and athletic women. Its widespread use is
particularly noticeable because most musical stars do not completely
match physical ideals of beauty, an obvious problem in a genre that
obsessively conforms to gender ideals in every other way

Arlene Croce notes 'the marked ordinariness of almost every
musical performer during the studio era',[21] and indeed the '110 per
cent woman' is not necessarily a beautiful woman In effect, despite
their appearances, all women have the potential to be the '110 per
cent woman' if they assume the appropriate kind of femininity-as-
performance. Thus, problematic female bodies such as Judy
Garland's are not as anomalous in the US musical genre as they
might seem[22] In fact, problematic female bodies are essential to the
musical so that they can be subjected to the processes of what Jane
Feuer calls 'de-mystification' and 're-mystification'[23] But while Feuer
refers generally to 'myths of entertainment', the crotch shot
convention mystifies the destabilization and restatement of gender

21 Quoted in Steve Cohan
"Feminizing the song-and-dance
man Fred Astaire and the
spectacle of masculinity in the
Hollywood musical in Steve
Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds)
*Screening the Male Exploring
Masculinity in Hollywood Cinema*
(New York Routledge 1993),
p 62
22 A number of theorists looking at
the musical have commented on
Judy Garland s problematic body
and consequently her camp
appeal as a performance of
femininity See Mizejewski
Ziegfeld Girl pp 172–3 176–8
198–9, Richard Dyer, 'Judy
Garland and gay men in
*Heavenly Bodies Film Stars and
Society* (New York St Martin s
Press 1986) Jane Feuer *The
Hollywood Musical* second
edition (Bloomington IN Indiana
University Press 1993) p 140
Robertson *Guilty Pleasures*
pp 60–62
23 Feuer *The Hollywood Musical*
p 43

The crotch shot serves a number of structural functions in the
Hollywood musical, naturalizing the connection between sex and

Eleanor Powell in *Born to Dance* (Roy del Ruth, 1936).

24 Eleanor Powell's 1930s films are *George White's Scandals/George White's 1935 Scandals* (Harry Lachman and George White, 1935); *Broadway Melody of 1936* (Roy Del Ruth, 1936); *Born to Dance* (Roy Del Ruth, 1936); *Broadway Melody of 1938* (Roy Del Ruth, 1937); *Rosalie* (W S Van Dyke, 1937); *Honolulu* (Edward Buzzell, 1939)

25 Sonja Henie's 1930s films are *One in a Million* (Sidney Lanfield, 1936); *Thin Ice/Lovely to Look At* (Sidney Lanfield, 1937); *My Lucky Star* (Roy Del Ruth, 1938); *Happy Landing* (Roy Del Ruth, 1938); *Everything Happens at Night* (Irving Cummings, 1939); *Second Fiddle/Irving Berlin's Second Fiddle* (Sidney Lanfield, 1939)

26 Catherine Williamson, 'Swimming pools, movie stars: the celebrity body in the post-war marketplace', *Camera Obscura*, no. 38 (1993), p. 9

gender, even for 'problematic' women. Specifically, this convention rehabilitates potentially problematic bodies such as the female athlete's. For example, the 1930s musicals featuring tap dancer Eleanor Powell[24] and figure skater Sonja Henie[25] ubiquitously incorporate the 'accidental' crotch shot into almost all of their routines. Since Powell was an MGM star, while Henie's films were made by Twentieth-Century Fox, the crotch shot was clearly not a strategy of a particular director or a distinctive studio practice. In these instances, where a female performer displays her athletic talent, the crotch shot serves generically to reframe the spectacle as a sexual rather than as a skilful display. This reframing depersonalizes the women's skill in the same way, Altman posits, as the 'posed' crotch shot does with chorus girls. In fact, the crotch shot often serves obviously to undermine the potentially problematic female body by refocusing audience attention onto the fact that she is 'just a girl'; perhaps a talented girl but a girl nonetheless. Catherine Williamson points out that in negotiating the potentially problematic athleticism of swimming star Esther Williams, MGM explicitly publicized this transformation: 'Instead of promoting her athleticism, the studio emphasized its "re-conditioning" of Esther Williams. In most publicity surrounding Williams, her athleticism was not erased, but rather "softened" or redirected to more feminine pursuits.'[26] This way of writing femininity across the body both contains the athletic female in the musical while simultaneously producing it as an erotic body.

The 'accidental' crotch shot is especially important in Powell and Henie films, as these supremely talented women are rarely matched

with similarly talented male leads. For example, Henie was repeatedly paired with Don Ameche and Tyrone Power, neither of whom sing or dance to any great extent in any of their films – a fact that is emphasized in this context. For example, when Ameche ventures out to meet Henie on the ice, he falls. Likewise, Powell is often paired with actors rather than musical performers: James Stewart in *Born to Dance* is one of her many non-singing, non-dancing partners. Given this anomaly in conventional gender roles (here women rather than men have the authority of talent) the crotch shot plays a particularly important cultural function: it serves to relocate Powell's and Henie's authenticity and suitability as partners through reference to their sexuality, even as it references their prowess and talent

In Henie's first and most crotch-centric musical, *One in a Million* (Sidney Lanfield, 1936), a series of crotch shots demarcates her body as the spectacular '110 per cent woman' rather than simply as an athletic female body. The plot centres around the tension between Henie as Olympic champion and Henie as spectacle. Once she has been declared to be both (her gold medal has been threatened by her status as a performer), little more remains but to confirm this successful negotiation through a series of crotch shots. Particularly noticeable in the final numbers of the film is the excessive simplicity of her routines in between some uncomplicated dance moves, she does little more than her trademark bunny hops and a series of turns and leg extensions which show off her panties. Despite being introduced as 'The World's Greatest Skater', Henie skates onto the ice, drops her cape and is lifted up by a male chorus who rotate her in the air, clearly exposing her crotch to the camera. The next number, a comedic interlude with a male matador and bull, is conspicuously more athletic than Henie's performances. In the finale, 'One in a Million', after a series of crotch shots the number ends with a quick turn in which her skirt flares out, again revealing her panties. The final image of the film is a crotch shot which ends with Henie briefly teetering on her blade points. Here it is her femininity rather than her skill that makes her the '110 per cent woman' The final moment, where Henie balances uncertainly on her blades, even serves to undermine her status as athlete. Thus both 'accidental' and 'posed' crotch shots function to reduce the female performer's skill or allure to the biological they serve to make her essentially and authentically female rather than an accomplished individual. It is this sexually-laden rather than skill-laden display that authorizes the pairing of the athletic female body with men who possess the authority of masculinity rather than talent.

Therefore, although the 'posed' crotch shots favoured by Berkeley and other early musical directors are among the most obvious, the crotch shot is part of the iconographic repertoire of the entire musical genre. While marked camera angles and choreography are

27 Steve Cohan and John Mueller
also note this costume change
Cohan, "Feminizing" the song-
and-dance man p 67 n 8
John Mueller Astaire Dancing
the Musical Films (New York
Knopf 1985), p 397

often used to aid the crotch shot, it is also facilitated by costuming
Indeed, extraordinary measures were sometimes taken in order to
facilitate the crotch shot in this way. For example, in the clip from
Silk Stockings (Rouben Mamoulian, 1957) reproduced in *That's
Entertainment!* (Jack Haley Jr, 1974) a costume is altered briefly
during the dance sequence.[27] In the 'All of You' number, Steve
Canfield (Fred Astaire) and Ninotchka (Cyd Charisse) are dancing
after he has serenaded her In the first part of the sequence
Ninotchka wears a pair of knee-length culottes that would obscure
any potential crotch shots. Subsequently, through some artful editing,
Ninotchka's costume actually changes three-quarters of the way
through the number. Her culottes briefly become a skirt and, as Steve
swings her into the air, this flies up to produce an 'accidental' crotch
shot of her pink underpants. In the final shot of the dance sequence,
Ninotchka is again wearing culottes The 'accidental' crotch shot
made possible by Ninotchka's costume change shifts the binary
opposition from shame/shamelessness to concealment/revelation
where, rather than a knowing display, Ninotchka's exposure seems
'accidental' While this crotch shot is part of the process of seduction
between Steve and Ninotchka, it also marks the shift in her
personality from a woman who shuns femininity to one who
spontaneously embraces it as a role Thus the focus is not on
Ninotchka's sex but rather on how she displays her sexuality. This
crotch shot marks the point where she begins to play with femininity
and to perform it consciously.

The 'accidental' crotch shot does more than emphasize the apparent
spontaneity of expression in musical numbers: it also draws
boundaries around femininity as a performance. While the '110 per
cent woman' is celebrated in the musical, other types of gender
performances are derided. *Calamity Jane* (David Butler, 1953) is a
musical that deals overtly with gender as performance Calamity Jane
(Doris Day), a woman who acts and dresses like a cowboy,
seemingly transgresses the boundaries and upsets the naturalization of
particular types of femininity Nevertheless, in the first number – in
which Calamity Jane introduces the 'Golden Garter' saloon as a site
for gender performance – there is a series of 'accidental' crotch
shots. Calamity leaps onto the bar and lies across it as she sings She
lifts her top leg, which both draws attention to her crotch and allows
her gun to fall across her groin as a phallus, and Calamity's leather
gun holster is suggestive in both shape and colour of male genitalia.
The camera dollies in and shifts its framing so that as Calamity sits
up, moves her gun aside and spreads her legs, the crotch shot is
emphasized. In this way, despite all appearances to the contrary,
Calamity is still situated as female
    Although Calamity's desire for a relationship is the narrative

impetus for her eventual transformation into the '110 per cent woman', it is her uncertainty about appropriate feminine display that initially prevents this In a short scene following the opening crotch shots, dialogue confirms this uncertainty about female display When shown a picture of vaudeville star Adelaid [sic] Adams, Calamity says, 'Why she ain't got nothing on but her underwear. . Looks like a fat, frilled-up side of undressed beef to me And I could look the same 'cepting I got certain ideas about modesty ' Here Calamity critiques excessive femininity as a mode of inappropriate sexual display. In contrast, Calamity's identity is constructed as asexual. While the opening crotch shots locate her as female, she is not feminine Since it is one of the aims of the musical that female and feminine become one, Calamity's body and sexuality must undergo a process of transformation into the '110 per cent woman' Although the object of her desire is male, in the musical genre sexuality is not about desire but about display. Thus she will remain asexual in the film until she learns how to display her sexuality While the excessive femininity of the '110 per cent woman' demands equally excessive female display with conventions such as the crotch shot, this display has to be carefully negotiated Even Calamity clearly recognizes the potential 'scandal of prostitution' often alluded to in other contexts, by mentioning modesty when she looks at the picture of Adelaid Adams As Calamity herself acknowledges, the boundaries of the femininity of the '110 per cent woman' are drawn around sexual display. It is only when a woman begins to perform her sexuality as a certain type of femininity that she can become the '110 per cent woman'.

As with the athlete's, Calamity's body must be carefully negotiated so that ultimately it is her authenticity as female, and her sexual-laden rather than skill-laden display, that will make her a '110 per cent woman' In a later scene, Calamity tries to convince Adelaid Adams to go to Deadwood This is a scene of mistaken identities: the woman Calamity assumes to be Adams is her maid, and the maid, in turn, initially believes that Calamity is a man Calamity responds to being mistaken for a man by saying, 'I guess I ain't much to look at But there ain't a woman in the world I can't outride or outshoot or. . Well, everybody can't have a figure like Adelaid Adams ' The woman Calamity is with, Katie Brown (Allyn Ann McLerie), in the course of impersonating Adelaid Adams, replies 'That's a matter of opinion' Calamity responds, 'In the opinion of Deadwood City, Ma'am, there ain't no other opinion' This conversation underlines two things about femininity within the structure of the musical. Certainly, as any watcher of musicals knows, the 'makeover' convention can transform any woman into a '110 per cent woman'. However, the musical actually needs a problematic female body so that the reformation of the merely female into '110 per cent woman' can be enacted as spectacle In

this scene, the power of femininity as performance is referenced by the fact that Adelaid Adams is not in fact Adelaid Adams but another woman standing in for her. This highlights the fact that an ideal femininity can be performed by a whole range of women Secondly, this '110 per cent woman' is a very particularly prescribed type of femininity. As a genre, the musical populates itself with one Adelaid Adams after another, a repetitious mono-femininity. While all sorts of women can perform as the '110 per cent woman', the femininity they enact is actually very carefully prescribed. Katie and Calamity must both undergo a process to become the Adelaid Adams version of the '110 per cent woman' that provides the spectacular impulse that structures the film.

Aside from Calamity Jane's central negotiation of gender, there is a series of secondary crotch shots in the films which reinforce gender as performance – though these secondary moments in the film seem incidental, as Steve Cohan points out

> what the Hollywood musical does foreground above all else when numbers interrupt the flow of narrative is the production of masculinity and femininity alike out of highly theatricalized performances of gender.[28]

28 Cohan 'Feminizing the song-and-dance man p 48

There is a pair of 'accidental' crotch shots during two onstage performances at the local 'Golden Garter' saloon. both of which depend on each performer taking on the guise of spectacular femininity Francis Fryer (Dick Wesson) is a professional performer who, due to a series of mistaken identities and narrative crises in which he has been presumed female, has to perform at the Deadwood saloon in drag The tension of Calamity's performance of masculinity necessitates an equally constructed performance of femininity at this point in the film Initially, Francis's performance is successful and the male audience responds enthusiastically However, his 'true' sex is revealed when his wig comes off. It is at this point, when the disparity between Francis's maleness and the femininity he is performing is revealed, that he raises his skirts to provide the second saloon crotch shot after Calamity's introductory ones Francis exposes closely-fitting, black and lime-green striped underwear that matches his outfit and emphasizes the bulge of his genitalia. Moreover, his underpants are worn over his white tights to emphasize his sex. The saloon owner tries to placate the audience by saying 'I may have been mistaken about his [Francis's] gender, but not his talent'. In opposition to the denial of skill-laden display for the problematic female body, here is a denial of masculinity as performance in favour of the authenticity of male skill-laden display

Femininity is a problematic ideal in *Calamity Jane*, a film in which the connection between sex and gender is repeatedly disrupted, only to be resolved on the body of a '110 per cent woman' While Francis's crotch shot emphasizes the constructed nature of femininity,

it also reinforces the idea that female=femininity and male=masculinity by exposing Francis and making his failure look ridiculous Like Calamity's masculine traits, Francis's performance of femininity can be successful temporarily, but it cannot be sustained in a narrative based on stringent gender norms When Francis first performs, the audience is addressed as 'Gentlemen and . . gentlemen' In a later saloon performance, in yet another case of mistaken identity Katie masquerades as Adelaid Adams. As she is about to perform, the audience is again addressed as 'Gentlemen and

gentlemen' However, in this instance, when there is a shot of the male audience, a large frilly sign with Adelaid Adams's name written on it dominates shots of the audience. Here it is the performance of femininity, not the men who watch it, that is important – despite insistences to the contrary

Katie's performance is not initially successful. like Calamity, Katie is not sure exactly what a performance of the '110 per cent woman' means Her performance is not spontaneous as she tries to imitate Adams's style, and so is not appropriate for a genre that depends on the naturalization of sex and gender While the musical repeatedly emphasizes the need to perform gender, it also – and equally insistently – constructs this performance as spontaneous/exuberant and therefore as natural The '110 per cent woman' cannot simply be performed, the performance has to be felt in order to 'remystify' the processes of gender For her performance, Katie wears a black 1890s leotard with pink accents The most obvious of these accents are her frilled underpants, which peek out beneath her costume at the front and the back. When Katie attempts to imitate Adelaid Adams, she fails However, when she performs as herself, inserting the spontaneity necessary for a successful 'accidental' crotch shot, the performance becomes much more overtly sexual. She begins to kick men's hats off (effectively putting her crotch in their faces) and does cartwheels. Katie's final move is a high kick onstage directly in front of the camera Katie's spontaneous crotch shots thus resolve previously disrupted gender norms and naturalize the performance of femininity by a female In the musical, spontaneity naturalizes excessive female display. Katie's success also reasserts the depersonalized nature of the '110 per cent woman', where one woman can stand in for another without reprisal as long as her performance conforms to the generic conventions of display In *Calamity Jane*, the crotch shot is a sign of gender authenticity even as femininity is constructed as a performance Thus the structure of the saloon-number spectacles (the dual crotch shots) serves both to naturalize and to normalize female=femininity and male=masculinity, even as various characters disrupt ideal gender norms.

During the period between 1933 and 1957, these ideal gender norms in Hollywood musicals were not static. Rather, iconographic conventions of the musical genre, such as the crotch shot,

constructed a series of diverse '110 per cent women'· slightly different details of the feminine ideal, but all similar in that the result was excessive, stylized femininity characterized by narrow modes of sexual display. Moreover, the '110 per cent woman' depended upon the physical display of sexuality and gender on the body The crotch shot marks the exact moment at which the social performance of femininity is visually anchored in the biological sex of the female performer. The crotch shot is, in effect, the apex of the masquerade of the excessive femininity of the musical genre. Even though iconographies and discourses about femininity that surround the crotch shot are often very different, the crotch shot still conforms to patterns of generic usage

29 Linda Williams, Film bodies gender, genre and excess Film Quarterly vol 44, no 4 (1991) pp 2–13

In her essay 'Film bodies. gender, genre and excess',[29] Linda Williams allows for new ways of thinking about the function of the crotch shot in the musical. Williams's 'bodies of excess' genres – porn, horror and melodrama genres – have four specific characteristics

30 Ibid p 4

- 'the spectacle of the body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion'[30] culminating in the money-shot (porn), the scream (horror) and weeping (melodrama),
- a focus on ecstatic states,
- conventions emphasizing a 'quality of uncontrollable convulsion or spasm – of the body "beside itself" ',[31] and

31 Ibid

32 Ibid Emphasis in original

- women's bodies as the 'primary *embodiments*'[32] of these excesses.

Although Williams mentions the musical and its emphasis on spectacle, she does not characterize it as a 'bodies of excess' genre This exclusion will be set aside here in favour of an exploration of how a comparison of the musical with 'bodies of excess' genres permits an understanding of the operation of the crotch shot within the overall structure of the musical genre

If, in Williams's formula, pornography=gratuitous sex, horror=gratuitous violence and terror, and melodrama=gratuitous emotion, then the musical is about gratuitous gender display Thus the Hollywood musical=gratuitous femininity because the Hollywood musical is structured around excessive female sexual display in its construction of the '110 per cent woman' The musical and, of course, the crotch shot repeatedly tie these displays of femininity back to performances that weave together the biological and the social In this they share a characteristic which, Williams points out, is essential to the 'bodies of excess' genres, which always locate their excesses in the physical In the musical, all problems and resolutions are displaced onto performances of femininity and onto the sexual spectacle embodied by the '110 per cent woman'

33 Astaire s film test results his career-long problematic body and the construction of masculinity are discussed in Cohan "Feminizing" the song-and-dance man p 62

34 Altman, The American Film Musical p 19

35 Ibid , p 45

36 Thomas Schatz Hollywood Genres Formulas Filmmaking and the Studio System (Philadelphia PA Temple University Press 1981) p 200

Like the necessary gender negotiations of the athletic female body, and in *Calamity Jane*, a negotiation must be undertaken wherever a male actor/character does not conform to masculine ideals When this happens. his deficiencies are invariably transferred onto the female body For example, in *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957), Fred Astaire's problematic body is displaced onto Audrey Hepburn's. Never a 'looker' (the derogatory comments about his first film test are legendary),[33] visually Astaire is not an obvious sexual partner for Hepburn; yet even though Hepburn is young and beautiful, it is her body that is presented as problematically unfeminine in *Funny Face*. Astaire's body can be resolved only when Hepburn's character becomes appropriately excessive within the diegesis. When Hepburn takes on femininity as masquerade, Astaire can then begin to perform an ideal gender role alongside her. Hepburn's rehabilitation excuses Astaire's. In this way, the Hollywood musical resolves a series of other challenges to stereotypical ideals of attractiveness by playing them out on the female body.

Rick Altman's theory of dual focus in the musical – for every female action there is an opposite and parallel male action[34] – is certainly a structuring foundation in musical spectacle. The *Calamity Jane* saloon crotch shots are the perfect example of this symmetry. However, the male and the female actions are not of equal importance. Altman contends that, 'The whole point in overdetermining the musical's dualistic structure is precisely to make sure that the spectator will sense the film's overall patterns [male/female, naturalization of the sex and gender equation] without analysis.'[35] Accordingly, even though the consistent dual focus of the musical repeatedly seems to present the couple as its determining structure, it is actually the female body that musical iconography depends upon. While the eventual narrative coupling resolves previously problematized gender relations, it also proves the successful performance of femininity Certain musicals may work through problems of masculinity, yet these problems are always transferred onto the female body and the '110 per cent woman', so that musical spectacle both begins and ends with female bodies.

Consequently, the musical is not simply about marriage or even sex In spite of connubial endings, couplings and marriage are essential only because they contain the excessive femininity of the musical by directing it, eventually, towards a socially acceptable arrangement. The '110 per cent woman' needs a '110 per cent man' so that her excessive performance can be mirrored, and hence contained, in a heterosexual relationship As Thomas Schatz points out, however, this contained 'ever after' romance is rarely shown in the musical, but rather projects the couple's 'ideal merger into the infinite expanse of mythic time'[36] While the romance is important, it derives its chief significance from the way in which it verifies successful feminine display As a result, it is the spectacle of

femininity rather than the final romance that the musical obsessively details It is the porn film, ultimately, that is left to portray the ecstasy of coupling Moreover, in the musical, all problems, solutions and ecstasies are played out on the female body rather than through male/female union; and these problems, solutions and ecstasies are usually about gender It is this excessiveness that the endlessly similar chorus girls filling stages and screens, the women, their clothes, their voices, their dancing, and their men serve to authenticate Just as the money-shot, the scream, and the tears of the other 'bodies of excess' genres express uncontrollable bodily responses, in the musical the intense sensation of being a '110 per cent woman' is embodied in the crotch shot. As in all 'bodies of excess' genres, in the musical the social is anchored in the biological

Refocusing the musical from the male/female embrace to the female crotch also explains the excessive sexual display of a genre whose audience is often characterized as being comprised largely of women and gay men (presumedly an audience peculiarly capable of appreciating gender-as-performance) Although the ecstatic state of the musical is 'written across the female body', often with clothing or in the arms of a man, the real focus is the ultimate achievement of a feminine ideal Because this ideal is supposedly a sexually enticing one, it is necessarily played out as a successful heterosexual liaison However, the real pleasure of femininity in the musical is physically embodied in the spontaneous, ecstatic crotch shot. In *Born to Dance*, Eleanor Powell's Central Park crotch shot is part of her courtship ritual with Jimmy Stewart. It is also an 'uncontrollable convulsion or spasm' of the body 'beside itself' as she begins spontaneously to perform femininity. Powell's crotch shot is an ecstatic display of her successful performance of femininity which, even more than her courtship with Stewart, asserts her attractiveness as a sexual partner Rather than being regarded solely as a site of desire, the crotch shot can also be seen as a celebration of the '110 per cent woman'. Despite frequent narrative insistences that the spectacle of the female body was for male and not for female audiences, the musical is a 'woman's genre' Thus the musical is not about what it pretends to be about. The ubiquitousness of the crotch shot convention is one indicator of this emphasis on femininity as masquerade, rather than on coupling

The ingenuity of the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical depends on the fact that it makes the excessive performance of the '110 per cent woman' seem both authentic and obviously contrived. In the musical, authenticity is located in the fabricated spectacles of the spontaneous and exuberant revelations of both 'accidental' and 'posed' crotch shots Paradoxically, the truly authentic body in the musical is the fully remystified product of performance where all is resolved and articulated on the female body of the '110 per cent

woman'. While Williams's 'bodies of excess' genre model is used here only for comparative purposes, what this comparison does produce is the concept of the crotch shot as the ecstatic apex of this excessive femininity in the musical. I have argued that the crotch shot is not a simple, isolated generic convention While it depersonalizes feminine sexual display and naturalizes the sex=gender connection, the crotch shot is also an essential structuring principle of the musical genre. It is not limited to Berkeley's 'posed' crotch shots which invite the audience to marvel at the shameless display of female anatomy Rather. 'posed' and 'accidental' crotch shots function to produce a very specific type of '110 per cent woman'. Clearly, Shirley Temple's 'babysex' aesthetic is just as determined by generic conventions as is the shift from the skill-laden to the sexually-laden athletic female body in the Hollywood musical.

Despite the 'behind the scenes of gender' of the crotch shot, the '110 per cent woman' is still a carefully constructed body in the Hollywood musical Understanding the crotch shot as an important convention in the Hollywood musical complicates the way in which women's bodies as spectacle are often understood. Often it is assumed that woman=spectacle, and that this equation is a simple one However, as my analysis of the crotch shot reveals, what seems to be the most blatant and simplistic voyeuristic device is in fact a complicated negotiation. This negotiation enables the musical as a genre to resolve iconographically the everyday problems of the gap between gender as lived and as an ideal, the crotch shot being a prime example of this, through the continuous transformations of women in the musical from the problematic to the ideal '110 per cent woman'

Not really white – again: performing Jewish difference in Hollywood films since the 1980s

JON STRATTON

In the 1980s there was a transformation in the way in which Jews and Jewishness were expressed in US films. This correlated with a rise in the popular acceptance of a form of multiculturalism that celebrates ethno-racial difference and of the identity politics associated with it In this essay I will begin by analyzing how films of the 1950s and 1960s discursively reproduced Jews as assimilated into white America I will then take three films that, in diverse ways, articulate aspects of the transformation. I will examine *Yentl* and *Zelig* from 1983, and *Desperately Seeking Susan* from 1985, all of which ambiguously express the shift I am describing. All three films are, in different ways, marginal to the mainstream Hollywood project and all three are by Jewish directors, two by women. *Yentl*, produced and directed by Barbra Streisand, who also starred in it, was the realization of a long-term personal dream made possible only after she agreed to make the film as a musical [1] *Zelig*, a Woody Allen film, was made in black and white as a pseudo-documentary; and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the first film of director Susan Seidelman, started out as a low-budget, independent production

These, and later films, begin to address the problem of representing Jews and Jewishness in the context of a sociopolitical move in the USA away from the forms of identification located in the ideology of cultural pluralism and towards those of multiculturalism. As I shall show, there has been a tendency to understand this development using the distinction made by Werner

1 Stephen J Whitfield *Yentl* in *Jewish Social Studies* vol 5 nos 1/2 (1999) pp 156–7

2 Werner Sollors *Beyond Ethnicity Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York Oxford University Press 1986)

Sollors between thinking in terms of descent and consent.[2] I will argue that, as a general rule, the American nation tends to think in terms of consent while racial and ethnic groups have tended to think of themselves in terms of descent. This is as true for American multiculturalism as for cultural pluralism. However, as Jews began to distinguish themselves from white America, they have tended to do so in the consensual terms that were central to their being accepted as white Key to this has been the trope of the double and the idea of performativity. This emphasis on 'consent', in the broadest sense, on Jewishness as a cultural effect, operates in tandem with the Judaic use of the halachic definition of a Jew, based on matrilineal descent, which is that for a person to be a Jew their mother has to be a Jew Consent signals the preoccupation of that paradox, the secular Jew

Jews, whiteness and assimilation

In *How Jews Became White Folks*, Karen Brodkin explains how, by the 1950s and 1960s, Jews in the USA had been elevated to 'whiteness'[3] She discusses how there developed 'a new, hegemonic version of Jewishness as a model minority culture   a male-centred version of Jewishness that was prefiguratively white, and a specifically Jewish form of whiteness, a whiteness of our own'[4] As Brodkin goes on to explain, the assignment of Jews to the status of 'white', and the assimilation implicit in the assumptions of prefigurative whiteness, produced a new series of difficulties for Jews in identifying the Jewish specificity of what came to be called ethnicity

3 Karen Brodkin *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1998)
4 Ibid p 139

The more or less racialized, visible presence of Jews in US popular culture started waning in the period between the two world wars At this time there was a strong emphasis on cultural assimilation While the idea of the melting pot, promoted by the English Jewish novelist and dramatist Israel Zangwill's play of that name first performed in 1910, argued for a new culture that combined traits from all immigrant groups, 'Hundred per cent Americanism', the ideology promoted by the anti-Semitic Henry Ford among others, wanted migrants to assimilate completely into Anglo-American culture.[5] At the end of his book discussing the ways Jews were visible on the American stage in the period between 1860 and 1920, Harley Erdman writes that:

5 On Hundred per cent Americanism see John Higham *Strangers in the Land Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press, 1955) chs 8 9

By the middle decades of the century, this presence [Jewishness] had become a seeming absence in popular culture, cloaked under other types of bodies, as what had once been a grotesque visibility gradually transformed itself into a generalized invisibility In the era of the melting pot, these stage types performed and created

6 Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew
   the Performance of an American
   Ethnicity 1860-1920* (New
   Brunswick NJ Rutgers University
   Press 1997) p 160
7 Patricia Erens *The Jew in
   American Cinema* (Bloomington
   IN Indiana University Press
   1984) pp 135–6

8 Lester Friedman *Hollywood s
   Image of the Jew* (New York
   Frederick Ungar, 1982) p 171

9 Erens *The Jew in American
   Cinema*, p 198

10 Riv Ellen Prell *Fighting to
   Become Americans Jews
   Gender and the Anxiety of
   Assimilation* (Boston MA Beacon
   Press 1999), p 190

11 Brodkin *How Jews Became
   White Folks*, p 169

new ideals of Jewish-American assimilation, resulting in a decades-long popular-culture disappearing act.[6]

Discussing film, Patricia Erens notes that during the 1930s, 'Jewish characters were totally de-Judaized, turned into Gentiles'[7]

In the 1950s, as Jews were being whitened, the key marker of their difference, as it was for the liberals of the Enlightenment era, was their religion. It was only after Jews were naturalized as white and as a minority culture that they returned in any numbers to the US film screens This change took place in the late 1950s and 1960s. As Lester Friedman writes·

> Fifties films with Jews rarely ventured very far beyond conventional situations and stereotypical characters. Such was not the case in the sixties when a new generation of filmmakers delved into the area of Jewish life previously and studiously avoided: Jewish criminal figures, the Holocaust, and the plight of alienated Jewish intellectuals[8]

These films of the 1960s were preceded by a series of films, starting in 1958, 'dealing with American-Jewish life and American-Jewish families'[9] The series begins with *Marjorie Morningstar* (Irving Rapper, 1958) and *Me and the Colonel* (Peter Glenville, 1958). From the late 1950s, then, the white Jews of the USA began to be portrayed in their cultural, rather than religious or phenotypically-based racial, specificity At the same time, the whiteness of Jews meant that many of the features of social and family life identified as Jewish could be picked up and appropriated by other whites as of more general applicability Thus, for example, Riv-Ellen Prell notes that:

> With few exceptions, the books and jokes about the JAP [Jewish American Princess, a figure which became common in the 1970s] suggest that one does not have to be Jewish to be a JAP Julie Baumgold [in a 1971 *New York* magazine article, 'The Persistence of the Jewish American Princess'] described Bette Davis, Yoko Ono, and Diana Vreeland as JAPs The humorist Anna Sequoia included in her list Princess Di, Zelda Fitzgerald, Nancy Reagan, Jackie Onassis, and Cher[10]

Like the bagel, the Jewish American Princess has come to be thought of as a more general part of (white) US culture. Brodkin, writing about the generalization of Jewish-mother bashing, puts the development this way· 'You didn't have to be Jewish to love Jewish offerings to white America'[11]

Here it is important to reflect on the constitutive features of white, post-World War II US culture. During this period it was not only Jews who were whitened, whiteness was extended to Italians, Greeks, people from central Europe and others. Matthew Frye Jacobson

describes the gradual shift in the USA from the 1920s on to a tri-racial division which, in its earlier days, was identified as Caucasian, Mongoloid and Negroid. The Eastern and Southern European migrants and the Irish, as well as the Jews, became absorbed into the unitary, white categorization of Caucasian As Jacobson writes

> In sharp contrast to the fading cultural regime under which writers like Dashiel Hammett would depict a racial underworld of immigrant gangsters, under which Frank Norris and Jack London would depict a naturalistic universe menaced by racially degenerate villains, or under which Hollywood could seize upon the Italian Rudolph Valentino to portray the racial exotic in a spectacle of Otherness, increasingly in the 1920s and afterward the landscape of American popular culture was peopled simply by blacks and whites [12]

12 Matthew Frye Jacobson
Whiteness of a Different Color
European Immigrants and the
Alchemy of Race (Cambridge,
MA Harvard University Press
1998) pp 117–18

13 Brodkin, How Jews Became
White Folks, p 147

However, and importantly, the groups which were whitened were not thought to be prefiguratively white. Rather, they had to learn to be white, in the process transforming some of their most basic cultural attributes such as the extended family Brodkin notes how, in his 1963 book written with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer, who happens to be Jewish, wrote about the Italian family in the pejorative terms of 'amoral familism'.[13] The cultural core of American whiteness remained the culture of Anglo-America. Thus, for Jews to be fully accepted as white, as differentiated from American, meant to be thought to have Anglo-American culture, an achievement made possible by the assumption of what, following Brodkin, we could call prefigurative acquisition. Here, we come upon one of the many contradictions, or at the least ambiguities, in the recent positioning of Jews in the USA.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, following a long Enlightenment tradition, Jews were portrayed as white and their difference identified not culturally but in terms of religion. A good example is *Body and Soul* (Robert Rossen, 1947) In this left-leaning film, John Garfield – a Jew born Julius Garfinkle – plays the main character who has the very Anglo-white and non-Jewish name of Charlie Davis The story traces Davis's development into a professional boxer. Some time after his father's murder, Davis overhears his mother seeking charitable help She describes herself as white and of the Jewish religion. This diegetic explanation is also the film's statement about the nature of being a Jew The combination of whiteness and religion, which also figures large in *Gentleman's Agreement* (Elia Kazan, 1947), a film about anti-Semitism, elides anything that might be identified as Jewish culture. The consequence of this discursive absence of a Jewish culture, unlike the idea of an Italian culture for example, was that once identified racially as white, Jews were able to be accepted as much more white, much more Anglo-American, than other groups. This is how, in practice, the idea of Jewish

prefigurative whiteness worked. It is this discursive merging of Jews, whiteness and Anglo-American culture which made it so easy for cultural aspects of Jewishness – perhaps best described as Americanized *Yiddishkeit* – to be taken on board as elements of Anglo-American culture. Indeed, it was this merging which made it possible for the Jewish films of the late 1950s and 1960s to gain a general, non-Jewish, American audience.

Civility and *Gentleman's Agreement*

When Erens correctly asserts that. 'The reawakening of ethnic identity during the 1960s was felt by almost all national, racial, and

14 Erens *The Jew in American Cinema* p 255

religious groups',[14] the Jewish reawakening entailed the presentation of a newly typified Jewish-American culture, one that was thought of as always already an inflection of Anglo-American culture In the 1980s, there was a shift away from the longstanding debate between assimilationist and cultural pluralist ideologies, both of which were based on universalist assumptions, in particular that all groups within the USA should share the same set of moral premises Instead, in the ideology of multiculturalism as this is understood in the USA, there was developing a new emphasis on difference and diversity, on differences which could even be of a type that might threaten the claim of an underlying national unity of moral order. This entailed an attempt to distinguish Jewish(-American) culture from the dominant Anglo-American culture rather than seeing it as a variant, and to distinguish Jews from Anglo-whiteness.

We must also differentiate here between the assimilation to whiteness which, as I have just described, involves the acceptance of Anglo-American culture if a group is going to be thought of as fully white, and acceptance into American society. In 'Multicultural Imagined Communities', Ien Ang and I argue that the unifying force of US society is not culture, as it is in most nation-states, but ideology, in particular the Enlightenment ideology of liberalism, individualism and freedom:

> This means that ethnic identity, or ethnicity – the source of cultural distinctiveness – is defined *outside* the general paradigm of a universal all-Americanness. The phenomenon of the hyphenated American – African-American, Asian-American, Italian-American, and so on – should be understood in this way: one culturally particular, the other presumed to be ideologically universal.[15]

15 Jon Stratton and Ien Ang Multicultural imagined communities in David Bennett (ed) *Multicultural States Rethinking Difference and Identity* (London Routledge 1998) p 144
16 David Hollinger *Post-Ethnic America Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York Basic Books 1995)

A correction needs to be made here, Asian-American and most probably African-American are not cultures in their own right but classificatory groupings within what David Hollinger has called the American ethno-racial pentagon.[16] That aside, what is being argued is that what binds Americans together is a shared ideology. What unites

and identifies ethnic and, ideally in the case of the officially sanctioned ethno-racial pentagon, racial groups is culture. Culture, as we shall see, is thought of in terms of cultural practices and products, as a surface phenomenon, something that, in its 1980s/1990s reassertion, is troped as performance. Ideology, in the sense that I use it here, is thought of as norms, values and attitudes, in other words a moral system. American Parsonian functionalist sociology has universalized this idea and claims that such a system is the basis of all societies. It is the sharing of a particular system of moral precepts which organizes and coheres US society. Culture is argued to give practical expression, in a variety of possible ways, to the unifying, 'underlying' moral order.

In the everyday, the expression of the shared ideology in social interaction is founded on what is called civility, we might say politeness. Civility is modern and bourgeois Norbert Elias has discussed well its historical evolution, dating it to the second quarter of the sixteenth century [17] Civility smoothes social interaction when there are individual differences between people and, more importantly for my argument here, between culturally diverse groups John Murray Cuddihy, who has described how the migrating Eastern European Jews reacted to the requirements of civility, offers a gloss on its practice in this description of an encounter between the pioneer Jewish feminist Bertha Pappenheim and the Russian Countess Barbara B. 'Shortly after, the Russian countess and the Viennese Jewess place around their substantive differences (it was 1911) the brackets of bourgeois civility· they perform the social rites, the offering of thanks, handshakes, and "goodbyes" '.[18] In the USA, civility is what enables the members of diverse cultural groupings who have assimilated ideologically to interact successfully.[19] Lester Friedman has described how this process translates to film.

> Hollywood films assign easily recognizable signs (e.g. speech, dress, food choices, and mannerisms) which when taken together function as overt codes that apparently signify divergent ethnic cultures A mosaic of seeming differences inundates viewers of American films, a virtual collage of skin colors, dialects, foods, mannerisms and lifestyles
>
> But by scratching the surface of the vast majority of these films, one plummets to their depths. The basic value orientation remains strikingly similar for most ethnic group members who inhabit American motion pictures [20]

Hollywood films were presenting a fantastic, and peculiarly American, solution to the problem of cultural difference The USA could accept cultural differences provided that the ideological and moral assumptions that informed those cultural practices were common to the American nation. It is the acceptance of these that makes a person American, whiteness in the USA, in addition to a

17 Norbet Elias *The Civilizing Process the History of Manners* (New York Urizen Books 1978)

18 John Murray Cuddihy *The Ordeal of Civility Freud Marx Levi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (New York Basic Books 1974), p 45 Pappenheim was Breuer s and Freud s Anna O For a discussion of Pappenheim s Jewishness and her feminism see Daniel Boyarin *Unheroic Conduct the Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1997)

19 On Jews and civility in the USA see Jon Stratton *Seinfeld is a Jewish sitcom isn t it?* in *Coming Out Jewish Constructing Ambivalent Identities* (London Routledge 2000)

20 Lester Friedman, Celluloid palimpsests an overview of ethnicity and the American film in *Unspeakable Images Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Urbana IL University of Illinois Press 1991) p 22

culturally constructed phenotypical classification in the terms of race, depends on the acceptance of Anglo-American cultural traits. The acceptance of the ideology founds the possibility for civility as the common basis for interaction between diverse groups. Building on this understanding, what makes American multiculturalism appear so threatening to some commentators is that it is thought to assert not cultural difference but ideological difference.

Using Sollors's distinction between ethnicity by descent and ethnicity by consent, Friedman identifies a contradiction He suggests that Hollywood films show 'primordialism and descent characteristics', that is, ethnicity in these films appears to be inherited from one generation to the next, and to have evolved apart from any influence in the USA Central to this idea is the importance of the connection between ethnicity and migration Migrants not only enter the USA, they also have to learn the correct way of thinking in order to enter the national, social polity. However, at the same time, these films also portray what Friedman calls 'consent values', that is that these ethnic groups demonstrate a shared moral system with that dominant in the United States. The discursive resolution of this contradiction is that these films are themselves products of American universalist thinking. They present an American ideal as a realist expression of American life These ethnic groups already have American ideology as their foundational moral system, so that the members of these groups, when they migrate, are always already American.

Nowhere is this more true than in films about Jews In *Gentleman's Agreement*, Gregory Peck, who is not a Jew, plays a reporter Phil Green, also not Jewish, who gets his story about anti-Semitism by passing as a Jew. Peck's ability to switch so easily between white Gentile and Jew simply by announcing his identification expresses the image of Jews as white with only religion separating them from Anglo-whites Here, the moral system of Judaism is assumed to be complementary to that of Christianity Indeed, Peck's ability to appear as either Jew or Christian is located in the naturalization of individualism. Considered as members of complementary religions, Jews and Christians are thought to be united in the same ideological system This is the underlying rationale for the argument that Jews are prefiguratively white

In Green's reading of being a Jew, the one foregrounded in the film, the ideal of cultural pluralism is played out – or performed, given what I have suggested as the ideological connection of performance to culture – in a character who, though Jewish by descent, is so 'white' and so (Anglo-)American in his value system, and so lacking in any Jewish culture, that he can switch ethnicities by choice Or rather, he can switch from being a normative Anglo-American to being an ethnic. In the film, as in life, markers that are thought to signify phenotypic Jewish difference are bound together

21 Quoted here from ibid p 24

22 Marjorie Garber *Symptoms of Culture* (New York Routledge 1998) pp 83–4

23 Referring to the title of his book *Thinking in Jewish* (Chicago IL University Press Chicago 1996) Jonathan Boyarin notes that 'the phrase alludes to the use of the term "Jewish" to designate the language otherwise known as Yiddish This usage is peculiar to a certain intermediary generation child immigrants and the children of immigrants from Jewish Eastern Europe (p 1)

24 As I have noted, Garfield changed his name from Jules Garfinkle to Jules Garfield when he worked on Broadway However as Larry Gross in *Contested Closets the Politics and Ethics of Outing* (Minneapolis MN University of Minnesota Press, 1993) retells the story, when he arrived in Hollywood Jack Warner told him that Garfield didn t sound very American When he was told that Garfield was the name of an American president, Warner relented but "Jules" had to go As one of Warner s executives put it "We wouldn t want people to get the wrong idea' But I *am* Jewish" said the future John Garfield Of course you are" said the Warners executive "So are *we* most of us But a lot of people who buy tickets think they don t like Jews And Jules is a Jew s name" (p 40)

25 Jacobson in *Whiteness of a Different Color* has an important discussion of Hobson s book from which the film was made He argues that Despite a plot that turns on the presumption of interchangeablity it is [the older] view of Jewish "difference" marked by a distinct Jewish physicality that silently gains the upper hand in the narrative (p 129)

26 This list – it could be much longer – comes from Neil Gabler *An Empire of Their Own How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York Anchor 1988) p 301

with cultural differences Peck/Green looks in the mirror and says 'Dark hair, dark eyes, just like Dave [his boyhood Jewish friend] No accent No mannerisms Neither has Dave '[21] Marjorie Garber has discussed this scene, which she links to the analogous scene in Valerie Hobson's novel on which the film is based Garber comments that. 'This tall, straight-nosed, accentless man without any "mannerisms that were Jewish" (query are there "mannerisms that are Christian"?) is the fantasmatic assimilated American Jew – no wonder Gregory Peck can impersonate one without difficulty' [22] Here Garber equates Jewish with Christian, clearly thinking of both as religious descriptors The conflation to which Garber alludes, at least the one most common in the twentieth-century West, is between Yiddish culture and Jewish culture [23] As Garber implies, a religion cannot give you an accent or mannerisms, which means, as noted earlier, that if Jews are defined by their religion, as Hollywood Jews were post World War II, then they do not have a culture Garber's main point, though, is that what makes Green/Peck, who is such a WASP, so able to impersonate successfully a Jew is the naturalization of the claim that Jews are just like/the same as WASPs, a claim on which the film is based and which it reinforces The implication here is that anti-Semitism is not the same as racism because if Jews are defined primarily by religion, then anti-Semitism expresses a religious concern, not a racial one

However, this is not the end of the story We must return to Dave Goldman, war veteran, the man to whom Green compares himself. Goldman was played by John Garfield, who also played the Jewish Charlie Davis [24] In *Body and Soul*, Garfield's appearance is whitened by the presence of the African-American actor Canada Lee who plays Ben Chaplin, the ex-champion who Garfield's Davis fights Garfield and Peck, Goldman and Green, do not look, to my eyes anyway, anywhere near as alike as Green wants to think, and as the film wants the audience to think [25] It is their ideological doubling which enables Green to pass as a member of a minority and subordinate group in the eyes of the dominant Anglo-Americans of the film.

The film's fantasy is that Goldman/Garfield should be able to pass the other way In fact, Garfield and a host of Jewish actors did pass as Gentile, if not Anglo-American· Stella Ardler had been Stella Adler, Sylvia Sydney had been Sophia Kosow, Edward G Robinson had been Emmanuel Goldberg, Paul Muni had been Muni Weisenfreund, among others.[26] From the period between the wars, the numbers of Jewish actors passing for Anglo, or for some indeterminate white ethnicity, helped to broaden the naturalized image of the Anglo-American, and of whiteness At the same time, this development helped to whiten the Jews

Green's desire in the film is that he and Dave should be a double, ethnically indistinguishable. In this narrative of assimilation where

anti-Semitism is morally wrong because Jews are 'just like us' except for their religion, the doubling is articulated by the well-meaning desire of the Anglo-American. As I shall demonstrate, in the films of the mid 1980s onwards, in *Desperately Seeking Susan* as in later films such as *South Park* (Trey Parker, 1999) which is discussed in my conclusion, and *Analyze This* (Harold Ramis, 1999), the doubling is an aspect of the production of Jewish difference These films utilize the motif of the double to express dissimilarity

White cultural pluralism and *Private Benjamin*

I have noted that after Jews were naturalized as white, in the late 1950s and 1960s there began a cycle of Hollywood films depicting Jewish-American culture – the culture depicted tended to be understood as an inflection of (Anglo-)American culture. In addition, these films were underpinned by the dominant American value-system This is most obvious in those films in which the lead character 'finds' him or herself Perhaps the epitome of such films was *Private Benjamin* (Howard Zieff, 1980), which Erens describes as 'Perhaps the quintessential Jewish film of 1980' [27] This film stars Goldie Hawn as a Jewish American Princess named Judy Benjamin, narrating her odyssey of self-discovery from her marriage to her second husband – who dies in orgasm on their wedding night – through her time in the American army, to her abandonment of her French-Jewish lover at their wedding canopy, and ends with her walking alone down the driveway, away from his mansion to a more self-oriented, rather than self-obsessed, self-confident and self-fulfilling life. I have already noted the generalization of the JAP across white culture in particular. The use of the JAP in this film, for reasons already discussed, is both Jewish-American and able to appeal to a broader white American audience

In Friedman's discussion of the film he notes that 'Basically, Judy's Jewish background is simply used as the butt of the film's humor' [28] He notes that 'All the Jewish characters are negative',[29] from her father who is an insensitive materialist, to her mother who is ineffectual and prone to tears rather than action, to her prospective third husband who is a philanderer All this is true, but it is only half the story

As I have indicated, *Private Benjamin* is a filmic version of a *bildungsroman*, a film which tracks Judy Benjamin's development from a dependent JAP to an independent, self-possessed and mature woman. It is in this regard, as both Erens and Friedman acknowledge, a feminist film The film, then, simultaneously appealed to a Jewish audience and to a 'universal' female audience as a film about a woman's empowerment. It is here that we can identify the problem Feminism, as it developed in the USA in the

30 Brodkin *How Jews Became White Folks* p 167

31 On Betty Friedan s biography and on her life s intersection with the Jewish influence on the second-wave feminist movement see Daniel Horowitz *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique the American Left, the Cold War and Modern Feminism* (Amherst MA University of Massachusetts Press 1998)

1960s and 1970s, took on as part of its fundamental ideology a universalist perspective. This was in spite of the fact that, as Brodkin, following Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, puts it, 'Jewish women were a significant part of the early, white, feminist movement and of the New Left' [30] Brodkin details how, 'in the 1950s and 1960s, when Jewish women first began to rebel against misogyny, they did so more as white middle-class women than as Jewish women'. A case in point is Betty Friedan's classic book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).[31] Reworking Brodkin we can say that in this universalist move, American Jewish women rebelled as white (American) women rather than as Jewish-American women In this way they naturalized their assimilated white positioning, and enacted the universalism at the heart of the unifying American ideology. At the same time, implicitly and very often unconsciously, they critiqued not only the male-centredness and misogyny of American society but also of the developing Jewish-American culture As Judy Benjamin learns to be her own woman she takes on an individualism steeped in universalist assumptions. She does not learn to be a self-possessed *Jewish* woman She is, in this sense, transformed from being Jewish and white to being simply white.

The narrative of Judy Benjamin's discovery of herself as an independent woman is aided by the negative portrayals of her family and lovers However, this opportunistic exercise reinforces a narrative movement away from ethnic cultural specificity to universal ideology This reading is reinforced by the narrative of the central section of the film, reflected in the title, Judy Benjamin's time in the army

The armed forces, along with education, are one of the two great nationalizing and homogenizing forces of the state The army is, if you like, an engine of assimilation. Judy is tricked into joining the army by an unscrupulous white recruiting officer She tells him that she doesn't think the army is for her, and she is proved right. She does not want to assimilate, she is happy as a JAP JAPs, however, are spoilt girls dependent first on their fathers and subsequently on their husbands JAPs are not empowered women Judy's parents come to take her home and, for the first time, Judy rebels against her father's domineering wishes. She makes her crucial decision, to stay in the army Having done so, she throws her considerable energy into learning to be a good soldier In rejecting her possessive and controlling father, the film also presents her as rejecting her Jewish background Finally, in the war games that complete her training, her squad, which includes an Italian-American (Gianelli), another ethnic white American (P.J. Soyer) and an African-American (Gloria Moe), captures the enemy commander In learning to use her initiative, Judy has also assimilated with the rest of her heterogeneous squad into American ideological universalism. Her reward is to become the first woman to join the highly prestigious parachute force known as the Thornbirds, shown as an Anglo-white and Jewish monopoly

Judy's final break with her old life is also her final break with her Jewish culture In having her leave Henri at the wedding itself, the film imbricates her rejection of her playboy groom with an implicit rejection of a Jewish culture which has, on the one side. constructed her as a JAP and, on the other, constructed the men in her life as self-centred and egotistical.

I am viewing *Private Benjamin* as typical of the way in which Jews were portrayed in films of the 1960s and 1970s. *Private Benjamin* comes at the culmination of this tradition In it, Jews were understood to be white but identifiable by a weak form of descent, which might be understood as the consequence of religious-inspired endogamy – and religious difference here was thought of primarily in terms of cultural practices Indeed, Jews were considered to be more or less the same as Anglo-Americans except for some cultural differences – in the weddings in *Private Benjamin* the religious aspects are subsumed into cultural practices, however, the moral role of the weddings is suggested to be the same as that of Christian-American weddings As we have seen, these Hollywood filmic Jews share the same fundamental moral system as the Anglo-American dominant culture In *Private Benjamin* it is not this that is in question. Rather, it is Judy Benjamin's personal development as a woman that is at issue. It is this which the film suggests is being held back by her family, and Jewish-American culture

Zelig and assimilation as a problem

Zelig can be read as a meditation on American-style assimilation, that is, assimilation not in the first instance to the traits and practices of the dominant culture but to the dominant ideology. Leonard Zelig, the son of an immigrant Jewish actor who worked in Yiddish theatre, wants to assimilate However, he does not understand that being like everybody else in the USA – being American – entails internalizing the ideology of individualism Discussing the representation of immigrants in turn-of-the-century comedies, Charles Musser writes

> Immigrants could only fully embrace American individualism by freeing themselves of ethnic traits, by constructing a new identity Assimilation was thus closely linked to American individualism [32]

Immigrants did not have to free themselves of ethnic traits. though this helped. especially if they wanted to whiten themselves. However. they did have to take on the national ideology and, along with this, become civil

American assimilation was closely allied to the modern distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere. The eighteenth-century German-Jewish Enlightenment philosopher, Moses Mendelsohn (1729–86), enjoined the assimilating Jews of Europe to

32 Charles Musser Ethnicity role-playing, and American film comedy from *Chinese Laundry Scene* to *Whoopee* (1894–1930) in Friedman, *Unspeakable Images* pp 48–9

33 On cultural pluralism see the classic discussion in Milton Gordon *Assimilation in American Life the Role of Race Religion and National Origins* (New York Oxford University Press 1964) See also Hollinger s critical discussion in *Post-Ethnic America* With specific reference to Jews in the USA see Cheryl Greenberg 'Pluralism and its discontents the case of blacks and Jews' in David Biale, Michael Galchinsky and Susannah Heschel (eds), *Insider/Outsider American Jews and Multiculturalism* (Berkeley, CA University of California Press 1998), Jon Stratton, 'Making space for Jews in America in *Coming Out Jewish*

34 Robert Stam and Ella Shohat '*Zelig* and contemporary theory meditation on the chameleon text', *enclitic* no 9 (1987) p 185

35 See Jon Stratton *Race Daze Australia in Identity Crisis* (Sydney Pluto Australia 1998)

36 Albert Memmi *The Liberation of the Jew* (New York The Orion Press 1966) p 70

'Be a Jew on the inside and a man on the outside'. In the USA this could have been revised as 'Be a Jew in private and an individual in public'. Indeed, this was precisely the line advocated by the cultural pluralists such as Horace Kallen in the 1910s and 1920s [33] It was so successful because it meshed so well with the constitutive organization of US society. The irony of Zelig's chameleonism is that it highlights the US's racial and ethnic diversity. Zelig transforms himself into a Chinese, an African-American, an Irishman and a Native American, among others – all, as Robert Stam and Ella Shohat point out, male [34] Stam and Shohat offer the insight that Zelig's not chameleonizing across sexual difference suggests 'the phallocentric limits of Allen-Zelig's *simpatia*'. However, I think it can be more productively read as being because Zelig's anxiety is not sex-based but ethno-racially based Zelig takes on not only the physical appearance of these people but also a range of their cultural traits

Zelig's chameleonism is strikingly similar to an acting out of the nationalizing desires of nineteenth-century European states, and of many settler states such as Australia In these countries the emphasis was on racial, and cultural, homogeneity Australia's 'White Australia' policy was supposed to produce just such a result [35] Migrants, who were only allowed in if they were judged to be white enough, were expected to assimilate into the dominant culture Zelig's chameleonism combines a physical doubling, an attempt to become the same as the person he is with, along with the acquisition of cultural characteristics The attempt at physical sameness would not have been so problematic in a country such as Australia, which demanded phenotypic homogeneity of its migrants Zelig's chameleonism is also the fantastic acting out of the migrant's cultural assimilation, an assimilation (s/he is already supposed to be basically the same) in which the migrant learns to act as a double, performing the cultural practices of the dominant culture until they become natural – until, that is, the migrant is transformed culturally into those about her or him Just under twenty years before Allen's film, the Tunisian–French Jewish thinker Albert Memmi commented on the metaphor of the chameleon for assimilation· 'The unkind comparison of the assimilated person to a chameleon is more profound than it might at first appear; for however well he reproduces the color and shape of his surroundings, however well he imitates their immobile rhythm, sooner or later he makes some surprising movement and reveals his presence' [36]

From the point of view of cultural assimilation it is not surprising that Zelig's psychiatrist is a woman of impeccable Anglo-American background, Eudora Fletcher Her mother comes from a wealthy Philadelphia family, and Eudora teaches Zelig civility and Anglo-American culture even as she is 'curing' him of his chameleonism Their marriage seals her success in 'civilizing' Zelig It is a

particular example of a more general trope in Hollywood films where a Jewish male's assimilation is signalled by his marrying an Anglo-American woman

After his cure Zelig addresses the young people of America:

> Kids, you've got to be yourself You can't act like anybody else just because you think they've got all the answers and you don't You have to be your own man and learn to speak up and say what's on your mind. Now, maybe they're not free to do that in foreign countries but that's the American way. I used to be a member of the reptile family but I'm not anymore

Here, Zelig explains to us how we are supposed to read his chameleonism: through the prism of the ideology of individualism Zelig's ethno-racial and cultural chameleonism, the fantastic attempt at the erasure of difference through the complete loss of both bodily and mental identity, is described here as a denial of individualism. It is no wonder that, in one scene, Zelig is shown happily immersed in the communal mass of people at a Nazi rally in prewar Germany

Zelig's rhetoric in his speech to American kids suggests the classic 1950s Cold War polarization of individualism and the utter conformity which was argued to be the price of Communism In the film, individualist ideology is read back into the desire for racial/cultural identification The film purports to show the Jewish Zelig finally assimilated into individualist ideology – as we have seen, he even marries a nice, well-off, Gentile, Anglo-American girl Shohat and Stam note that:

> Zelig is never more conformist than when he starts to 'be himself'. In the end, he acquiesces in middle class values and speaks in the clichés of ego-psychology and the self-help manual [37]

37 Shohat and Stam *Zelig* and contemporary theory pp 189–90

Individualism actually entails the conformity for which Zelig has been so desperately looking Irving Howe, author of *The World of Our Fathers*, a book about the way of life of Yiddish immigrants to the USA around the turn of the century, says in a mock interview in the film: 'I mean, he wanted to assimilate like crazy'. In the end Zelig assimilates both ideologically and culturally. His cultural assimilation and his marriage signal his whitening. He has come a long upwardly-mobile way from his Yiddish immigrant origins We must remember, though, that most of the film shows Zelig as a chameleon, ludicrously but desperately attempting to identify with a wide range of diverse people Diegetically, then, the film may be read as a commentary on the failure of cultural assimilation and on the problematic situation that American Jews found themselves in by the 1980s.

Producing Jewish difference: doubling

Marla Brettschneider explains that, 'as pluralism was becoming a household word in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we also began to see a shift toward a politics of protest, identity, and imagination in which we root multiculturalism. Many Jews, individually and organisationally, were involved in this new form of politics'[38]

38 Marla Brettschneider Introduction to Marla Brettschneider (ed), *The Narrow Bridge Jewish Views on Multiculturalism* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1996) p 15

Through the 1970s, the politics of multiculturalism supplanted those of cultural pluralism, and began to present a distinctive African-American presence in American culture. Assimilated as white, and as having American (Christian) values – Judaism was understood to prefigure Christianity and was integrated through the rhetoric of a Judeo-Christian tradition – the presentation of a Jewish-American culture had been legitimated in the ideological terms of cultural pluralism. Friedman, looking forward to the 1980s, suggested that 'If the first two years of the eighties prove an accurate indicator of Hollywood trends, Jews will figure even more prominently on celluloid in the new decade. Many Jewish characters have already appeared, some in the most unlikely places'[39] This assumes a

39 Friedman, *The Hollywood Image of the Jew* p 287

cultural pluralist continuation where characters may, or may not, be Jewish because their presence as Jews will not, in itself, influence plot development. This is because they are thought to be 'just like everybody else', sharing the same ideology as other whites. I am arguing that this is not what happened in the 1980s. Instead, towards the middle of the decade, films began to explore the problem of acknowledging and presenting a Jewish difference from the Anglo-American dominant culture, a difference not simply located in an idiosyncrasy of some cultural practices but one based in the very specific experience of Jews in the USA, and their specific and diverse group histories before arriving there What was at issue, representationally speaking, was how to produce and present difference for a group which had, for three decades, been presented as white, and as subscribing to the key value system of Anglo-America, which is also claimed as the value system of the USA.

The first problem, then, is distinctiveness. In the films that I am discussing this is often dealt with by a process of doubling Homi Bhabha makes much use of this idea, viewing doubling as central to the experience of modernity and, therefore, of colonialism. Thus, for example, he writes that:

> the uncanny lesson of the double, as a problem of intellectual uncertainty, lies precisely in its double-inscription The authority of culture, in the modern *episteme*, requires at once imitation and identification.[40]

40 Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (London Routledge 1994) p 136

For the assimilatory subject, and often the dominant order, the fantasy is that imitation will lead to identification Zelig's chameleonism may be read as a most extreme version of this

41 Ibid p 75

Elsewhere, Bhabha connects the idea of doubling in the colonial context to his theorization of mimicry: 'My contention is splendidly caught in Fanon's title *Black Skin, White Masks* where the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit – a grotesque mimicry or "doubling" that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego'.[41] In Bhabha's work the colonial subject is, perhaps by definition, the subject for whom the possibility of assimilation has been refused. Hence, a mimetic doubling is a consequence of the subject being trapped between imitation and identification. The key is the production of the double by the colonizer as a consequence of the colonizer's making full assimilation impossible, usually through the use of race as a marker of Otherness. In the films described here the double is produced by the subordinated group as part of its attempt to express difference Here it is an aspect of *deassimilation*.

Underlying Bhabha's thinking about the double is Sigmund Freud's thinking Freud's discussion, in 'The "Uncanny"', culminates in an argument about the return of the repressed

> When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness [associated with the double] can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted – a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect The 'double' has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.[42]

42 Freud The Uncanny"' in James Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol XVII p 236

Here, the double which was a useful tactic for the child – Freud refers earlier to Otto Rank's idea of the double 'as an insurance against the destruction of the ego' – returns in adulthood, in post-Oedipal psychosexual life, as an uncanny experience. The trajectory of Freud's argument is towards the internalization of the double, towards finding a way of thinking about the double as the function of an individual's psychosexual development.

Freud begins his discussion by writing about the double as it appears in E T.A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixir* Freud describes how

> we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another – by what we should call telepathy – so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience, in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own.[43]

43 Ibid p 234

Elsewhere, following the insights of Cuddihy, I have examined the idea that much of Freud's work is founded on his experience of being an assimilating Jew of East European background in Vienna [44]

44 Stratton *Coming Out Jewish*

Here we have another example: Freud's description of the double. at this starting point of his discussion, expresses the fantasy, and the problems. of assimilation Thus, he starts by outlining characters who are thought to be identical because they look alike This can be read as a troping of the experience of Jews being thought to be white The mention of mental processes 'leaping from one of these characters to another' tropes the hope that the person assimilating will, 'magically', be able to pick up and adopt the life-ways of the dominant group Finally, the subject's doubt expresses the experience of splitting, of inbetweeness, and, I might add, of anxiety and the experience of uncanniness, which is often the lot of the assimilating person. Of the films I am writing about, *Zelig* is most directly concerned with these issues It is set back in time, to the interwar period of 'Hundred per cent Americanism', when complete cultural as well as ideological assimilation was demanded *Zelig* is, ultimately, a film about the impossibility of assimilation made at a time when it was being increasingly acknowledged that assimilation in its classical sense was not possible.

In *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the doubling of the Rosanna Arquette and Madonna characters, Roberta Glass and Susan, is crucially related to the process of undoing assimilation, of decolonization. of producing a difference even while the narrative of the film suggests an acceptance of assimilation. Indeed, the film's conclusion is, in its form of feminist politics, remarkably similar to that of *Private Benjamin*

Vivian Sobchack has commented on the ambiguity of Roberta Glass's Jewishness:

> On the one hand, it is telling that it is a character named Roberta Glass who is *Desperately Seeking Susan* in Seidelman's 1985 postmodern pastiche about amnesia and switched identities The suggestion of Jewishness about the name (and Roberta's circumstances as a bored, suburban New Jersey housewife) should give one pause, as should the fact that the Susan who arouses Roberta's curiosity in a personals column, the Susan she longs to be, is hardly coded Jewish – played (and costumed) as she is by Madonna. On the other hand, the cultural and personal identities at stake in this film have little to do with Jewishness or WASPishness [45]

45 Vivian Sobchack 'Postmodern modes of ethnicity in Friedman (ed) *Unspeakable Images* p 337

The identities that are privileged in the film are those that characterize the ideology of individualism. However, as Sobchack suggests, this is by no means the end of the matter Roberta Glass, and her peers, are Jewish – there are more markers of this than just Roberta's name – and they have lived the Jewish-American dream. They have assimilated and been identified as white, and been upwardly mobile It is worth noting that Rosanna Arquette is not Jewish, thus adding to Roberta's assimilatory ambivalence

Roberta and her husband Gary have made it, but suburbia is unfulfilling for her. Gary, who sells swimming pools and spas, is having an affair, which perhaps suggests, in one way at least, that it is more fulfilling for him. Hers is a textbook case of the effects of Betty Friedan's 'feminine mystique'. Friedan described the circumstances of housewives both in the city and in suburbia. However, for her it was the massive expansion of postwar suburbs that provided the more problematic environment [46] Brodkin comments on Friedan's own life that

46 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London Victor Gollancz 1963) pp 243–57

> she struggled to arrive in the promised land of the white suburban world, only to be confronted with its emptiness for Jewish women. In this context we can reread Friedan's plaintive 'Is this all there is?' as particularly Jewish, even though her Jewishness and Jewish radicalism are not part of her own story [47]

47 Brodkin *How Jews Became White Folks* p 168

The Jews struggled to achieve this American dream and, being allowed to assimilate after World War II, achieved it only to discover its emptiness, at least for the housewife. *Desperately* portrays Roberta's struggle to find something worthwhile for herself, something exciting and engaging that can replace the mindlessness of following the recipes of television chefs. *Desperately* intertextually highlights, and comments on, the Jewishness of Friedan's book in the film's portrayal of the extra disappointment of Jewish women who, as Jews, had overcome all obstacles to reach the postwar promised land of white suburbia.

The film's title is lifted from the ad that Susan's itinerant band-member boyfriend places in the newspaper when he and Susan are arranging to meet, but it is also a metaphor for Roberta's life. Roberta is desperately seeking the kind of romance and excitement that she fantasizes Susan's life must have. Following Susan, and acquiring her cast-off jacket, Roberta is accidentally knocked out. When she comes round, suffering from amnesia, she is identified as Susan and is able to become her for a while. Believing herself to be Susan, Roberta lives Susan's life rather than performing it. Here, the fantasy of assimilation is played out for the individual. Roberta gets to actually be white, and probably Anglo – Susan's heritage is not made clear but her name suggests an Anglo background in spite of her being played by Madonna (and it being the given name of the film's director). Indeed, having Madonna play the part helps to broaden the visual image of Anglo whiteness in the film. In Roberta's living of Susan's life, Zelig's desire is fulfilled in a way he could never achieve through chameleonism. In their different ways Roberta and Zelig act out anxieties and fantasies associated with attempting to practice what is entailed in the ideology of assimilation. From a Jewish point of view, *Desperately* plays out the nagging suspicion that assimilating groups have, that the 'real people', white people, the ones with whom they are assimilating,

lead more fulfilling, exciting, *complete* lives than those assimilating can ever live.

As fully white, Roberta gets to live a full life, falling in love with Susan's boyfriend's (Gentile) best friend and performing in a magic show – something which deeply shocks Gary when he finds out. It is a gentle irony that Roberta, who as Susan has naturalized her assimilation to Anglo-American whiteness, enjoys performing in the magic show so much. By the time she remembers who she is, Roberta has established the completely assimilated, and non-Jewish life she wishes to lead. Rather like Judy Benjamin, Roberta leaves behind an apparently morally bankrupt Jewishness, symbolized in her philandering husband and his blinkered sister. Nevertheless, for the majority of the film we are offered a double, Susan, the Anglo-American woman with the exciting life and Roberta, the Jewish-American woman searching for something more than Jewish-American family life in suburbia. Through the mechanism of this double, Roberta is marked as not just another bored housewife in the suburbs but as a *Jewish-American* housewife. In this way the film starts to open a space in which the Jewish production of difference begins to take place.

Producing Jewish difference: performance

The second problem in the production of post-assimilation Jewish-American difference is centred on performance. Here, we need to recall the centrality of performance in the practice of assimilation. Today, with the move to cultural understandings of ethnicity, performance is – perhaps ironically – associated with the establishment of difference. In her discussion of postmodern modes of ethnicity in Hollywood film, Sobchack argues that

> ethnic consciousness is no longer experienced as something natural based on tradition and descent or as something to be assimilated and converted in the melting pot. Rather, it is experienced as something cultural which must be constantly invented, consented to, and negotiated with other social beings [48]

48 Sobchack Postmodern modes of ethnicity p 348

Sobchack, like Friedman, is using Sollors's distinction between descent and consent here. Elsewhere she argues that, 'being ethnic meant having a cultural identity structured and regulated by the constraints of *descent* – whereas being American (unethnic, assimilated) meant having a cultural identity structured and transformed by the freedoms of *consent*' [49] Identity by consent is fundamentally performative, it depends on the subjective naturalization of culturally agreed-upon signifiers.

49 Ibid p 332

Post-assimilation Jewish-Americans are thought of, unlike their pre-assimilation migrant forbears, as American – or, perhaps more

correctly, they have been included in American whiteness, in the dominant culture of the USA which Americans naturalize as American culture. It is not surprising, then, that as Jewish-American culture attempts to specify itself out of American culture – that is, attempts to produce its difference – it should do so, at least in the realm of film, through a preoccupation with the performative. In this usage I am making a distinction between being a Jew, which is an attribution that has traditionally been claimable as essential, and Jewishness. The traditional understanding of who is a Jew – through having a Jewish mother – associates ethnicity with descent. Judith Butler has defined gender as 'the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' [50] Butler's argument here is that gender is naturalized through performance. Drag, as the performance of another gender, is the example for which Butler is best known Working over the Esther section of Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, Naomi Seidman asserts that: 'Ethnicity .. can be a kind of drag, an inversion that says "appearance is an illusion" '. [51] Jewishness, like other ethnicities, can in this way be thought of as a set of attributes which are repeated and become naturalized as identifiably Jewish. [52] The difficult question is, then, is this enough to make a person a Jew? This problem gets addressed in *The Big Lebowski* (Joel Cohen, 1998) in terms of whether conversion can make a person as much of a Jew as being born one. In this film we have Walter Sobchak (John Goodman) – the name has an intriguing intertextual echo – who converted to Judaism when he married his ex-wife, Cynthia. Walter, a Vietnam war veteran, is aggressive and unstable The trauma of the war substitutes for the trauma of the Holocaust At one point Walter gets into an argument with The Dude (Jeff Bridges) about whether he is really a Jew or a Polish Catholic. As far as Walter is concerned he is a Jew because he converted, for him performing as a religious Jew makes him a Jew. For the film's audience it does too. At least, until we discover his conversion The debate over Walter's status signals the complex religious, cultural and ethnic/racial issues involved. There is, of course, no resolution in life as in the film.

Butler is herself Jewish. In an interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal she says:

I understand myself as a progressive anti-Zionist Jew I think my Jewish background is more formative than anything else – which is probably why I can't write about it. My agony and shame over the State of Israel is enormous, and the kinds of contributions I make in that domain have little to do with my being queer. They may have something to do with my being a woman, but they're more closely related to certain kinds of anti-racist views I have [53]

50 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York Routledge 1990) p 33

51 Naomi Seidman Fag-hags and bi-Jews toward a (Jewish) politics of vicarious identity in Biale et al (eds), *Insider/ Outsider*

52 Anne Brewster has made the link between ethnicity and performance using Butler s work 'it is useful to explore this notion of a dynamic and reinvented ethnicity with the assistance of Judith Butler's concept of performativity For what results is a conception of 'performative ethnicity' Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations Post-colonialism Nationalism, Globalism* (Melbourne Melbourne University Press, 1995), p 81

53 Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, Gender as performance an interview with Judith Butler' in *Radical Philosophy* no 67 (1994), p 39

54 Sander Gilman *The Jew's Body*
(New York Routledge 1991),
p 133

55 Boyarin *Unheroic Conduct* p xiii

56 Ann Pellegrini Whiteface
performances "race" gender
and Jewish bodies in Jonathan
Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (eds)
*Jews and Other Differences the
New Jewish Cultural Studies*
(Minneapolis MN University of
Minnesota Press, 1997) p 109

57 Ibid , p 119

58 There is a tradition of Jewish
background writers of whom
Butler is one, being concerned
with issues of personal practice
in everyday life, and with cultural
construction issues that derive
from the problematic of
assimilation These include Georg
Simmel Ervin Goffman – whose
use of metaphors of performance
is very appropriate for a
discussion of *Yentl* – and Harold
Garfinkel, who invented
ethnomethodology It is worth
adding that Eve Kosofsky
Sedgwick who along with Butler
is hailed as one of the founders
of queer theory, is Jewish On
her Jewishness see Naomi
Seidman, 'Fag-hags and
bi-Jews

59 In a more essentialist register
Sandra Bernhard has said that I
feel more concerned about being
a Jew than I do about equating
myself with being gay I feel like
there's more anti-Semitism than
there is anti-homosexual feelings
It's like if the Nazis came
marching through they'll come
after me as a Jew before they
do as a chic lesbian Quoted in
Pellegrini Whiteface
performances , p 140 This is
perhaps the best place to note
also that Judith Butler is one of
the people that Pellegrini
acknowledges as having read an
earlier draft of the chapter

60 Butler, in Osborne and Segal
Gender as performance p 33

Butler asserts that she cannot write about herself being Jewish. I would argue that her work is a displacement of such a writing. We can begin by thinking about the importance of gender and performance, of gender as performance, in Butler's work. In modernity Jews were feminized Sander Gilman notes how, in his infamous work *Sex and Character*, first published in German in 1903, Otto Weininger, himself a converted Jew, restates 'in a scientific, i e., biological context Arthur Schopenhauer's views on women and simply extend[s] the category to the Jews' [54] Daniel Boyarin makes the same point more generally. He writes: 'I start with what I think is a widespread sensibility that being Jewish in our culture renders a boy effeminate'.[55] Boyarin's formulation suggests the additional homosexual attribution. Obviously, this feminization not only affects Jewish males As Ann Pellegrini asks: 'But what room does the intense, anti-semitic identification of male Jews with "woman" leave for Jewish women? In the collapse of Jewish masculinity into an abject femininity, the Jewish woman seems to disappear.'[56] Pellegrini explains how, in Freud's work, 'by representing femininity as a derivative of masculinity, Freud also reveals "being" a woman as a passing performance'.[57] 'Women' pass as women, 'Jewish women' pass as (white) women. The central metaphor here is assimilation. Both the discourse of race and of sex/gender have been key terms in the modern formation of identity. As we can now see, in the modern world there has been a lengthy history of overlap between the two discourses where Jews have been concerned, and this has, at least in the case of male Jews, overlapped with the discourse of homosexuality as this developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century

Butler's work inscribes gender and, to a lesser extent, sex, as not only performed but as performatively constructed, and does this from a female, and particularly a lesbian, perspective.[58] We can now understand the historical relevance of Butler's books, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, which were published respectively in 1990 and 1993 The books can be read as as a theoretical legitimation for performative difference Like Friedan and others before her, Butler universalizes her own, Jewish experience. In the process she implicitly identifies a place for the queer, Jewish woman – her own identity – as the more performatively constructed of identities [59] This expresses a particular historical moment, that of the transformation in the American post-assimilation experience of being Jewish, and of being a Jew by descent, and especially of being a (lesbian) Jewish woman. When Butler defines performativity as '*that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*'[60] we can think of the attempt to produce a distinctive Jewishness in the USA out of the ambiguities of Jewish-American whiteness.

In a fascinating review article on Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* and Butler's *Gender Trouble*

61 Jonathan Boyarin Before the law there stands a woman *in re* Taylor v Butler (with court-appointed Yiddish translator), *Cardozo Law Review* no 6 (1995) p 1322 This article has been republished in Boyarin *Thinking in Jewish*

62 Ibid , p 1318

63 Sobchack Postmodern modes of ethnicity' p 332

64 Ibid p 333

65 'Yentl the Yeshiva Boy in Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Collected Stories* (New York Farrar Strauss Giroux 1996)

66 Ibid p 149

Feminism and the Subversion of Identity Jonathan Boyarin argues 'that it would "enrich" [Butler's] account to "identify" as a Jew'[61] Boyarin is concerned that Butler's discussion lacks any involvement with the possibility of the making of subordinate identities As he puts it 'One problem in translating Butler [hypothetically into Yiddish] is that she consistently presumes a situation in which there is one hegemonic epistemic regime and takes no account of persistently resistant counter-hegemonic epistemic regimes'[62] I would argue that Butler's lack of concern with such counter-hegemonic regimes is precisely because her thinking comes out of an American-Jewish interest in assimilating Butler's starting point is, if you like, the question of performing sameness while preserving a knowledge of a difference

Sobchack develops a general historical argument to account for what she understands as a shift to consent-based ethnicity. For her, we live in 'what seems to be the advanced stages of an age of representation',[63] a time in which: 'We exist at a moment when identity, memory, and history are re-cognized as mediated and media productions – constructed and consumable images available for countless acts of recombination, revision, and recycling'[64] This development can be understood as complementing and contextualizing the more specific concerns I am describing in this essay.

Yentl can be read as expressing well the movement from a naturalized understanding of identity in terms of descent and heritage, to an understanding in terms of performance and performativity. In light of my discussion of Butler and her work, it is not surprising that a film which articulates the development of Jewishness as performative should link it closely to the expression of gender as performative In *Yentl*, the Jewish-by-descent Barbra Streisand plays a Jewish woman performing, and passing, as a young Jewish man in order to get into a *yeshiva* so that she can study the Torah, something that in Yiddish Eastern Europe of 1904, where the story is set, was forbidden for women.

The film is based on a story first published in 1962 by Isaac Bashevis Singer entitled 'Yentl the Yeshiva Boy'[65] Singer's story assumes a difference between sex, based on physical differences, and gender. At the heart of Singer's story lies a critique of the rigidity of Yiddish gender roles which could not make an exception for a 'boy' in a 'girl's' body Singer has Yentl's father, a rabbi, say that she has 'the soul of a man' because she is such an apt pupil, and describes Yentl, at the beginning of the story, as being.

unlike any of the girls in Yaneer – tall, thin, bony, with small breasts and narrow hips On Sabbath afternoons, when her father slept, she would dress up in his trousers, his fringed garment, his silk coat, his skullcap, his velvet hat, and study her reflection in the mirror She looked like a dark, handsome young man[66]

67 Ibid p 165

Later, when Yentl has revealed herself as a woman to Avigdor, the man with whom she has fallen in love, Singer has Avigdor thinking that: 'All Anshel's explanations seemed to point to one thing she had the soul of a man in the body of a woman'.[67] Anshel is the name that Yentl takes as a boy.

Yentl's desire to study, which marks her soul as male, could not be accommodated in Yiddish society where study was reserved for males. The consequence is that Yentl, rather than accepting her lot as a woman defined by her body, embarks, after her father's death, on the deception of dressing and behaving as a man Singer equally considers this problematic. She has a dream in which 'she had been

68 Ibid p 153

at the same time both a man and a woman'[68] and had worn both male and female clothes. Her period is late; perhaps as one *midrash* suggests, you can get pregnant from desiring a man Singer comments on all this that:

> Only now did Yentl grasp the meaning of the Torah's prohibition against wearing the clothes of the other sex By doing so one deceived not only others but also oneself. Even the soul was

69 Ibid

> perplexed, finding itself incarnate in a strange body.[69]

Things go from bad to worse the confusion caused by Yentl's deception leads her to marry Hadass, the woman that Avigdor loved but whose family forbade the marriage. As the narrative ends, having revealed herself as a woman to Avigdor, Yentl sends divorce papers to Hadass and, importantly for Singer's moral, 'Anshel disappeared

70 Ibid p 167

without a trace'.[70] Avigdor finally marries Hadass. Yentl, as Anshel, takes her problematic identity and disorienting transvestism out of the story; normality and tradition are reasserted through Avigdor's and Hadass's marriage They go on to have a male child who they name Anshel Finally, in the epistemological terms of the story, a real male is called Anshel, closing the story with a further reinforcement of the importance of traditional roles

Streisand's *Yentl* offers a profound revisioning of Singer's text In this 1980s Jewish-American Hollywood film, the main emphasis is not on the problems caused by rigid gender roles but on a woman's equality, on women's right to be able to do the same things that men do. Yentl's passing as Anshel is not because she has the soul of a man in a woman's body but because she is forbidden as a woman to study, and she wants to study. Dressing as a man gives her the opportunity

The film places Yentl's transvestite performance as a male Jew in opposition to Yentl's real identity as a female Jew For the vast majority of the film Streisand performs so successfully as a male Jew that she convinces all the other characters, including her best friend/lover, Avigdor, and the woman that she marries The film offers us a Jewish actor as a female Jew performing a male Jew living the culture of male Yiddishness/Jewishness The convincing

performance of gender can be read as unsettling any claim to the naturalness of being a Jew when a 'Jew' is defined by cultural attributes, suggesting that Jewishness is a performance Another Jewish feminist text, *Yentl* affirms sexual difference as it argues against gender roles and for women's rights. In Streisand's transvestism, the film also implicitly legitimates a distinction between Jew and Jewishness, constructing the latter as performance

In *Yentl*, Yentl constructs her own performative double, the male Anshel The filmic division between the 'real' Yentl and the performed Anshel repeats the American historical distinction between the 'real' Jews/Jewishness of the Eastern European migrants, who were classified as non-white, as racially Jews, who arrived at the turn of the century, and the newly produced, and performed, difference of problematically white Jewish-Americans in the 1980s and onwards The end of the film is important rather than simply disappearing, as in Singer's story, Yentl is shown on a boat heading for *die goldene medinah*, the golden land of America. Yentl becomes one of the migrants who, pre-whitening and pre-assimilation, were identified and distinguished in terms of descent and of racial difference from the consent-based community of the American nation

71 Whitfield, 'Yentl' p 158

Singer thoroughly disliked the film One reason he gave was the substitution of a different ending,[71] which transforms the emphasis of the story. In the latter, the focus is on Yentl's disruption of the highly organized Eastern European Yiddish world. In the film, the emphasis is on Yentl's feminist struggle. The implication of the ending is that what was not allowed in Eastern Europe will be possible in the new Jewish-American way of ordering Jewish life – and if not there, then, as for Judy Benjamin and Roberta Glass, in the Anglo-American mainstream of American life The end of *Yentl* creates a bridge between Yentl and her double, Anshel, by suggesting that in the USA a woman with the soul of a man will have access to whatever she wants to do, gender roles will be disarticulated as performance from Jewish sexual identity The implication is that Jewishness can become a form of ethnic performance, in the same way that it is a form of gender performance throughout *Yentl*, excepting the beginning and end.

It should be noted that, like *Yentl*, both *Private Benjamin* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* are feminist films. The Jewish-American, or more correctly Yiddish-American, questioning of the roles available to women in American society during this period spills over into a questioning with a rather different politics, that of what it is to be Jewish in a society that has whitened you and apparently offered you assimilation

Yentl, Zelig, and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, then, mark the awkward and ambivalent beginning of the attempt to express Jewishness as a

performance that identifies Jews as a distinct group within American multiculturalism while retaining, in a moderated form, their classification as white. While Jewish self-identification in terms of descent continues, there is an emphasis in Hollywood film on distinctive, shared cultural signifiers which will clearly distinguish Jews as a group from whites and, in particular, Anglo-Americans While African-Americans and Asian-Americans often use the rhetoric of race to ground their difference, Jewish-Americans, especially secular ones, tend to privilege the performance of cultural difference as expressing fundamental difference from the dominant culture

These concerns continue to be played out *South Park* (Trey Parker, 1999) is a recent Hollywood film in which the ambiguities involved in the new Jewish politics of identity are enacted In this cartoon film, based on the cult television series of the same name, identity is reduced to national difference but Canadians are styled as different in particular ways While all the rest of the cartoon characters are drawn more or less similarly, Canadians are drawn with mouths that cut right across their faces This marker of physical difference equates with the virulent anti-Canadianism of the film. Canadians can be read as the film's Jews. Terrance and Philip, the comedy duo whose scatological humour makes their television show the favourite of the South Park kids, and whose film precipitates the war between the USA and Canada in *South Park*, are Canadian. In the anti-semitic tradition of the way Jews have been positioned within western, modern nation-states, Terrance and Philip are perceived as infecting the moral order of the USA Moreover, their fart humour can be read as a metaphor for the way that the 'uncivilized' *Ostjuden* were experienced in Europe and the USA The American comedian whose use of scatology is most reminiscent of Terrance and Philip's was the Jewish-American Lenny Bruce, who was himself excoriated, and prosecuted for obscenity, by the white American establishment.[72]

The identification of Canadians as Jews is most clearly evoked in the Broslofskis In this Jewish-American family Kyle is the natural Jewish son, Ike the adopted son. He is Canadian The Broslofskis are drawn to look like all the other American characters Ike looks different We are never told about his natural parents However, one of the television episodes is about his *bris* (circumcision ceremony) Through the character of Ike, with his traditional Jewish name, Ike/Isaac, unlike Kyle who bears an Anglo name suggesting assimilation, the connection can be made between Canadians and Jews Kyle and Ike form another version of the doubling discussed earlier. In their case, the doubling marks the displacement of Jewishness and anti-semitism This displacement onto a national group suggests the anxiety over the assimilation of American Jews (in the film Jews and white Gentiles look the same, implying the acceptance of Jews into American whiteness – but are they really

different, as Ike is?) and the anxiety over Jewish nationalist aspirations (American Zionism and the support of Israel). At the same time, the displacement eases the problem of thinking of ethnicity through consent identification by displacing it onto a national group, where, as we have seen, it is more conventionally located.

'As they really are, and in close-up': film stars on 1950s British television

SUSAN HOLMES

In 1956 the popular weekly cinema programme, *Film Fanfare* (ABC TV, 1956–7), introduced its viewers to its televised coverage of the film star:

> I think you would all agree that it could be interesting, and good entertainment, to go out and meet the famous film stars as they arrive in this country Most of us have seen them in their big screen roles, but very few of us see them as they really are, as themselves, and in close-up

How was the promise of showing film stars 'as they really are' shaped by the new technological possibilities of television? How did these appearances interact with the stars' film performance or 'big screen roles'? *Film Fanfare*'s introduction suggests how this coverage was promoted to the early viewer, and what its novel appeal was considered to be It raises questions about how British television participated in the cultural circulation of the film star from an early stage, and the institutional, technological and aesthetic factors from which this shift emerged

The quote above comes from one of *Film Fanfare*'s presenters, John Parsons Not only does he entice us with a glimpse of the 'real' person 'behind' the star, but he anchors this to what is presented as a specific device of television – its closeup This may seem paradoxical as the closeup, of course, has more often been perceived as specific to film, particularly with reference to the representation of the star. Frequently cited as a crucial factor in the emergence of the star, the closeup is similarly seen as a privileged moment in

1 Richard Dyer, *Stars* (new edition)
(London British Film Institute
1998) p 15
2 Richard Dyer *Heavenly Bodies
Film Stars and Society* (London
Macmillan 1987), p 11

revealing the 'real' self. Richard Dyer refers to 'the widely held view
.   that the close-up reveals the unmediated personality of the
individual   . this belief in the "capturing" of the "unique" "person"
of a performer is probably central to the star phenomenon' [1] The
closeup, in disclosing the star's face, can be seen as a 'moment of
"access" to the star's private self' [2] But the opposite may also be
true, as the star's face can operate as a mask or enigma, most
famously in the case of Greta Garbo. Yet Dyer's description of the
filmic closeup as 'unmediated' is crucial since, according to *Film
Fanfare*, this is what *television* was seeking to present. In a specific
bid to construct the appeal of this new coverage, it is defined in
opposition to the constraints and 'mediation' of the stars' film
performance or 'big screen roles'

At a time when television was contributing to a decline in
cinemagoing, this could be seen as an attempt to usurp the cinema's
role as the primary place in which to experience the stars – 'in
closeup'. Yet this simplifies the extent to which television was
seeking to develop its own form of coverage. The intertextual
construction of stars can offer the illusion of a more 'unmediated'
access to their offscreen persona, so this was not new in itself In
Parsons's introduction, however, intimacy is constructed in relation to
the particular aesthetic structures of television. In the 1950s
television screens were often small so the televisual closeup would
not offer a much larger scale image of the human face than that
which we encounter in everyday life, and we do not consider this as
offering access to the 'private self' Yet the construction of film stars
already plays with notions of distance and aura, and Parsons
deliberately invokes this to particular effect. Specifically
foregrounding the larger size of the cinema screen, he describes the
televisual closeup as offering a more 'intimate' access to the star,
exploiting what were seen as key characteristics of television at the
time – intimacy and actuality With its smaller image and closer
relation between audience and screen, television attempted to attract
the early viewer by promising a more 'authentic' perspective on the
film star which offered a new visual and discursive *access* to their
'private self'

It would be misleading to suggest that it was new to experience
the star in the home, as stars had appeared on BBC radio in
interviews, talks and programmes for many years. Yet television
could offer what John Ellis terms the 'star-in-movement',[3] previously
only available on the cinema screen. These appearances were rapidly
institutionalized as the 1950s progressed and are evidence of close
relations between cinema and television in Britain being present from
an early stage Largely based on the film industry's refusal to sell
any feature films to television, previous studies have perceived
British cinema and television as 'rivals' at this time,[4] yet the film
programme foregrounds their increasing convergence These series

3 John Ellis *Visible Fictions*
(revised edition) (London
Routledge 1992), p 99
4 See Ed Buscombe 'All bark and
no bite the film industry s
response to television in John
Corner (ed) *Popular Television in
Britain Studies in Cultural
History* (London British Film
Institute 1991) pp 197–209

forged the first sustained relations between the British film industry and television and kept them in constant interaction throughout the decade The first regular film programme was *Current Release* (BBC, 1952–3), but it was during the mid 1950s – particularly after the advent of Independent Television (ITV) in 1955, that coverage of film culture rapidly increased By mid decade, star interviews were a regular feature on topical or entertainment series such as *In Town Tonight* (BBC, 1954–6), *This Week* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1956–68), and *Tonight* (BBC, 1957–65), as well as various 'women's' programmes Features such as *Close-Up* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1956–63), *Portrait of a Star* (Associated Television, 1955–7) and *Filmtime* (BBC, 1955–62) offered a profile of a particular star, sometimes including a personal appearance The two main cinema programmes, however, were *Picture Parade* (BBC, 1956–62) and *Film Fanfare*, where stars appeared in film previews, interviews, premieres and 'behind-the-scenes' footage of filmmaking It was in the studio interview that the early viewer most frequently encountered the film star, and *Picture Parade* and *Film Fanfare* interviewed a wide range of stars, from high-profile Hollywood names and popular British stars to up-and-coming actors and hopeful starlets.

In conceptualizing television's coverage of the film star, *Film Fanfare*'s introduction crucially contradicts theoretical arguments Although this is an area which has remained largely unexplored in academic studies,[5] certain assumptions prevail: namely that (on a number of different levels) television works to 'de-glamorize' the film star. For example, with reference to interviews on late-night American talk shows, P David Marshall claims that in their live appearance on these programmes, film stars 'break the narrative closure of their filmic texts'[6] They enter into the current time of live television and address the viewer directly:

> This acknowledgment of presence serves to reduce the aura constructed by the narrative film, where the film actor lives in a world quite separate from the film viewer . [It] decontextualises the aura of the star and re-creates the possibility of the star establishing a more personal and familial public personality. The celebrity guest enters into the daily circulation of images and meanings of the audience. Indeed, his or her new non-narrative centered discourse is that of conversation with the program's host; the style of discourse is itself heavily invested with the ordinary, the everyday, the familial[7]

Citing Walter Benjamin, Marshall suggests that the television interview depletes the glamour and thus the 'aura' of the film star[8] Benjamin was of course writing before television emerged and considered film to be one of the most powerful agents of reproduction. In comparing the film and theatre actor he suggested

5 Denise Mann does focus on the shift of film stars to the home However Mann is more concerned with the ideological construction of the female star and their address to the female viewer The shows she discusses also find no easy comparison with the British cinema programmes See The spectacularisation of everyday life recycling Hollywood stars and fans in early television variety shows in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (eds) *Private Screenings Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis MN University of Minnesota Press 1992) pp 41–69

6 P David Marshall *Celebrity and Power Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis MN University of Minnesota Press, 1997) p 126

7 Ibid

8 Ibid, p 226 This refers to Benjamin s 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, trans Harry Zohn in Hannah Arendt (ed) *Illuminations* (London Fontana Press 1973)

that the latter possessed an 'aura' unavailable to the film star. In the theatre, the actor is present in the same space as the audience so a more 'personal contact' is made, and the actor can adjust their performance in relation to that audience For Benjamin, this contrasts with the film star as 'the camera is substituted for the public. Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays.'[9] That Benjamin did not consider the film performer to be 'auratic' in the first place is an important qualification to Marshall's use of his argument. In this respect, it is difficult to see why television would constitute a radical shift It may well be 'reproducing' the image of the film star still further, but this is also true of other media, such as fan magazines

9 Benjamin The work of art p 223

Perhaps Marshall is appropriating Benjamin's suggestion that

the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura [is] . the desire .. to bring things 'closer' . which is just as ardent as the bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.[10]

10 Ibid p 216

The notion of television bringing the stars 'closer' to the audience (which then creates a decay in aura) is implicit in Marshall's argument in which it is partly related to the stars' adoption of a televisual mode of address. In an early attempt to map out the institutional and textual structures of film and television, John Ellis argued that while the cinema produces stars, television presents the 'personality',[11] yet this seems problematic given that performers often move between film and television. However, why this should create a 'decontextualization' of the star's aura is unclear It certainly raises the question of how different media shape the intertextual construction of the star in different ways, and a comparison between television, radio and the fan magazine could be pursued in further detail. The glamour photo or poster, for example, also reduce the size of the film star, encourage a form of direct address, and bring the celebrity into closer contact with the audience But the still image has a central place in the iconic construction of the stars, so why should it be seen as reaffirming their glamorous and exceptional nature, while television causes a depletion of this aesthetic? Presumably intended to contrast with the filmic performance, a similar question arises over the star entering a non-narrative discourse when appearing on television Exemplifying the relations between intertextuality and aesthetic commodification, the media construction of film stars typically functions through a process of narrativization,[12] and television is arguably no different As a result, the distinction between film and television performance is not as simple as it may first appear. Although Marshall's study refers to contemporary media, there is nothing to suggest that it is specifically

11 Ellis Visible Fictions p 106

12 Barbara Klinger 'Digressions at the cinema reception and mass culture, in James Naremore and Patrick Bratlinger (eds) Modernity and Mass Culture (Indianapolis IN University of Indiana Press 1991) p 129

situated in a recent context. It appears to be a universal conception, applicable to any period, place or star – it is simply how television shapes and presents the image of the film celebrity. The early film programme suggests otherwise, as these appearances need to be understood in the context of the historical factors which shaped their development

In this essay I shall be drawing on recent historical research to explore how film stars negotiated the shift to the new medium, specifically with regard to the television interview. To do this I use existing editions of the programmes (and intertexts such as *Picturegoer* fan magazine) to consider how these appearances were shaped by the new possibilities of television and its developing modes of address. In exploring whether the programmes offered the stars 'as they really are', I challenge the assumption that television depletes their 'glamour' and presence, as a number of strategies worked to maintain, and often foreground, their 'auratic' status. As the case study of Joan Crawford will illustrate, the television interview negotiated a complex space in relation to the stars' film performance and as part of their wider intertextual image

In analyzing the extent to which the stars established a more 'familiar' personality, their interaction with the host is particularly important. Conceptions of the television personality stress the importance of an informal relaxed rhetoric, and this was a mode of address deliberately pursued by television in its early years When interviewing the stars, the presenters on both programmes would sometimes straddle a chair (sitting on it back-to-front), attempting to convey the impression of a casual situation, a friendly chat, and would also sit very close to the star.[13] When Macdonald Hobley interviewed Terence Morgan (perhaps now best remembered for his role as the father of a deaf girl in *Mandy* [Alexander Mackendrick, 1952]) on *Film Fanfare* they were positioned on a two-seater sofa facing the front With barely an inch between them, this set-up emphasizes the close physical contact and informality between presenter and star, and bodily proximity is further reinforced by the framing of the interviews. In the above example the framing is very tight, and the camera remains static for much of the interview Strategies for shooting the television interview were still developing at this time, yet in the case of the film programme this had particular consequences The tight framing and often static camera reinforced the physical closeness between presenter and star and as *Kine Weekly* observed, the presenters on both programmes 'tried to give the impression of being on intimate terms with [the stars]   . presumably aiming at making viewers feel the same'.[14]

As the example of Terence Morgan illustrates, this intimacy was further accentuated by smoking in the interviews and Hobley crosses to the sideboard to get a packet of cigarettes, offering one to his guest When associated with film stars, smoking was seen to connote

13 *Picture Parade* was presented by Peter Haigh and Derek Bond while *Film Fanfare* used a range of presenters including Macdonald Hobley, Peter Noble Paul Carpenter John Parsons and John Fitzgerald As well as being popular television personalities several of the presenters had also acted in film themselves This link was perhaps intended to give the impression of an inside knowledge of the film industry

14 *Kine Weekly* 1 November 1956 p 8

15 In 1950s editions of *Picture Post*
British stars (such as Jack
Hawkins and Phyllis Calvert)
were often seen in cigarette
adverts which interwove the
product with references to the
stars' current films. See an
advert for Capstan cigarettes
featuring Jack Hawkins which
referenced his current picture,
The Cruel Sea (1953). Hawkins
insisted that 'after I've smoked
this Capstan, I'll be able to sink
fifty U-boats!' *Picture Post*,
13 June 1953, p 96

glamour and sophistication, and it was part of their desirable image. Films, of course, had frequently depicted stars smoking and these connections were played out intertextually when film stars appeared in advertisements, endorsing particular brands.[15] The depiction of stars smoking on the programmes would thus have seemed natural, expected even, and it was drawing on conventions established in other media. On television, however, while shaping the construction of a sophisticated 'adult' image, it specifically contributed to the relaxed and informal atmosphere. The cigarettes were sometimes offered at the end of the interview, which gave the impression that the chat was to continue after the camera had cut away, reinforcing the impression that the presenter and star really were on 'intimate terms'.

This familiarity was played out on a discursive, as well as visual level, and this is best illustrated by Peter Noble's 'gossip spot' on *Film Fanfare*. In characteristic rapid-fire fashion, Noble summed up which studios were producing which films, where particular stars were working and so forth. As a well-known showbusiness journalist, Peter Noble was introduced as the 'gossip columnist who knows the stars in person', and he capitalized on this by referring to the stars on very informal terms, claiming they had telephoned him, dropped by his home or sent him telegrams. For example, when Diana Dors was travelling to America, Noble claimed that she was keen to keep in touch with the programme: '"Having a wonderful crossing, love to *Film Fanfare* and especially to you, Diana Dennis" – that's the fabulous Diana Dors – thankyou Di.' He then brought news of Stewart Granger: '"Expect to see me in a week or two stop. Jimmy

G " Well. Jimmy G is Stewart Granger, known to all his friends as "Jimmy".' Noble gave the impression that he knew the stars on a personal level and that he could offer the viewer news about their lives from his privileged point of view.

In keeping with television's developing mode of address. there was an attempt to draw the star into this informal rhetoric through the actions and posture of the host This was a strategy to shift them into the discursive (rather than literal) space of the television personality, as Marshall's argument suggests. These strategies – associated more with the everyday, the familiar – could also be seen as a threat to the stars' aura and the greater distance maintained by the film performance Yet the construction and reception of the television personality is particularly associated with a *direct* address. something often also adopted by the stars in other forms of intertextual circulation such as the fan magazine, the photograph or on radio In television, however, stars often avoided addressing the camera at all. While they were marked as being 'outside' of their fictional roles, as just 'being themselves'. the absence of a direct address had more in common with a specifically filmic performance style In general, the privileged address to the audience is associated with the presenter who is effectively 'standing in' for the audience, and this contrasts with the distance maintained by the star. At a conceptual level, this can be seen as an oscillation which plays on the ordinary/extraordinary paradox so central to the construction of the film star, the way in which stars 'are presented as both stars and ordinary people: as very special beings, and as being just like the [viewer]' [16] While in the fan magazine this may be played out on a discursive level (stressing the star's conventional or mundane hobbies, for example, versus their glamorous lifestyle), in the television interview this is further layered at the level of *performance,* and the context in which this takes place. The star is 'ordinary', situated in an informal. 'domestic' space chatting with the presenter, perhaps smoking, yet they retain an element of distance and aura by not addressing the viewer directly

The stars' performance style was further shaped by the sets which structured the early British film programme, and these are crucial in re-imagining their television appearances. Both *Picture Parade* and *Film Fanfare* constructed a semi-fictional aesthetic in which the sets were designed to simulate film studios, cinema foyers, theatres and offices. *Film Fanfare* also included various domestic areas with sofas, coffee tables and stills of film stars on the wall, and in *Picture Parade*, the 'cinema foyer' was flanked by a uniformed doorman and the 'office' was organised by a diligent female secretary who was often visible, working silently in the background. When sitting behind their desks, the presenters on both programmes occasionally answered the telephone in order to take a 'message' from the hectic world of showbusiness. For example. *Film Fanfare*'s John Parsons

16 Ellis, *Visible Fictions* p 94 This was developed by Dyer in *Stars* (1979) The work of Jackie Stacey in *Stargazing Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London Routledge, 1994) and Mann s The spectacularisation of everyday life have crucially illustrated how this paradox is historical shaped by broader cultural discourses and transformations

17 W Farquarson-Small
26 September 1951 'Current
release notes BBC Written
Archive Centre (hereafter WAC)
Caversham T6/104/1

interrupted his address to the viewer to add an important date to his star diary: 'So that's Shirley Jones .. 9.45, London airport, flight 510, Monday'. Staged 'digressions' such as these became a generic convention of the early film programme, and in the case of the BBC, this setup was originally conceived as adding 'variety and verisimilitude to the general magazine content of the series'.[17] As this suggests, in a programme dealing with films and film culture, it was considered appropriate, natural even, that it should be presented in a context that reflected its subject, and the stars were situated in this cinematic world

This semi-fictional aesthetic further raises the issue of the relations between the star's film and television performance. In *Picture Parade* the stars were often interviewed on the sofa in the 'cinema foyer' and in *Film Fanfare,* in a living-room type set, adjacent to the 'casting office' This created less a form of 'non-narrative discourse' than a further narrative, as simply by entering the sets, the stars became part of a semi-fictional world of filmmaking, gossip, cinema theatres and foyers At the beginning of *Picture Parade* the host and star would often enter through the 'cinema foyer' doors, the star then handing their coat to the doorman They were required to pretend that these spaces were real, in much the same way as they would perform on a film set. The viewers and the film industry, however,

18 Complaints occurred frequently in
BBC viewer research reports and
in the trade press

often criticized this aesthetic.[18] This was perhaps because it demanded a suspension of disbelief – we are asked to believe that the hosts are really chatting on the telephone about the arrival of the stars – and this was something they had not expected to associate with a nonfictional genre They anticipated, perhaps, a clear difference from the star's film performance (after all, *Film Fanfare* had promised the stars 'as they really are'), but they were nevertheless situated in a semi-fictional world

The links between the stars' film and television performances are most interestingly played out in Joan Crawford's first ever appearance on television, a debut she made on the BBC's *Picture Parade*. Although ITV paid higher fees for star appearances,[19] it was *Picture Parade* that featured more of the big US stars, at least when it came to personal interviews Crawford's interview was perceived to be a significant moment in the series, and it is not necessarily a typical case study Yet her high profile and fame make her appearance all the more pertinent when considering the claim that television depletes the star's 'aura'

19 This was made clear when the
Daily Sketch published an article
on Diana Dors with the headline
Dors says no to BBC
Apparently ITV usually offered
125 guineas for an interview
over 100 more than the BBC
(12 June 1956 WAC, BBC press
cuttings box P662)

Crawford's appearance on *Picture Parade* coincided with her visit to Britain to work on *The Story of Esther Costello* (David Miller, 1957) and in an unprecedented manner, the coverage spanned two editions of the programme Peter Haigh opened the first edition by explaining 'we would like to introduce .. a few of the many men and women who . bring you news of events and personalities through the columns of our national papers . Tonight we meet

them on the job, and hear what they have to say about yet another
fabulous visitor to Britain.' The 'fabulous visitor' was Joan
Crawford. The first edition featured the work of the press and
photographers as Crawford arrived, while the second programme
screened footage of her visit, beginning with her appearance at the
National Film Theatre. Prior to the screening of her Academy
Award-winning picture *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945), she
arrived to meet members of the British Film Institute and answer
their questions. The scenes were transmitted on the monitor with
Peter Haigh's commentary contextualizing and clarifying the images
seen:

> with her in the foyer are her husband, Alfred Steele, and twin
> daughters, Cathy and Cynthia ... [Here is] Ernest Lindgren, the
> Curator of the National Film Archives ... and a kiss for Jympson
> Harman, the doyen of all film critics ... he assures Joan of a
> warm welcome awaiting her in the cinema.... A photographer's
> last chance to get a picture before Joan Crawford went to meet
> members of the British Film Institute ... and there she is, amid
> the applause of the crowd, taking her place on the rostrum ...
> never lost for an answer, Miss Crawford was a vivacious subject
> for her questioners.[20]

20 Edition transmitted 7 August
1956

This commentary not only narrates but narrativizes her visit, and it
works to foreground her fame and prestige. Haigh paces his
description very carefully, gradually building up to the narrative
climax when Crawford arises 'amid the applause of the crowd'.

Despite this introduction, it is fair to suggest that the peak of
Crawford's career had now passed, and according to her biographers,
this was a troublesome time for the star. In 1955 Crawford entered

21 Alexander Walker *Joan Crawford The Ultimate Star* (London Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1983), p 158

22 *Radio Times* 8 February 1957 p 5

23 Shaun Considine, *Bette and Joan The Divine Feud* (London Century Hutchinson 1989), p 284 For a discussion of Crawford s bad press at this time see also Pamela Robertson *Guilty Pleasures Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (London IB Tauris 1996) pp 98–100

24 *Picturegoer* 24 August 1957, pp 8–9

25 *Picturegoer* 27 July 1956 p 8

her fourth and reputedly secure marriage with Alfred Steele (president of Pepsi-Cola), yet she had begun to drink heavily and was acutely aware of her declining career.[21] Crawford does indeed appear a little unstable in the interview (and Haigh later admitted elsewhere that they 'celebrated her first live television appearance with [his] first vodka').[22]

This raises the issue of how Crawford's television appearance interacted with the construction of her star image at this time, particularly at an intertextual level With the decline of the studio system in the 1950s, stars lost the protective barrier that existed between them and the press Partly to combat the competition from television, the US press and scandal magazines published increasingly sensational stories about stars' private lives Prior to the release of *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), Crawford was one of the first stars to be scrutinized in this way. In a press expose entitled 'Joan Crawford – queen or tyrant?', her relatives, co-stars and directors all denounced her domineering and cruel behaviour, and her offscreen persona repeatedly received bad press reports [23] While her visit to London in 1956 occurred at a time of greater personal and professional stability (having just wed Alfred Steele and signed a three-year picture deal with Columbia), it is striking how the US reports contrast with Crawford's intertextual construction in Britain at this time. Although evidently a different type of publication to those mentioned above, the British fan magazine *Picturegoer* is a case in point here In 1957 Crawford was featured in the article 'Do you love a star who's forty?'[24] which makes the sweeping complaint that 'the reluctance of the . . Joan Crawford generation to retire graciously from youthful roles – in short, to act their age – is partly responsible for the current drop in movie attendance', and insists that they should 'age' into 'character roles' rather than playing lovers in romantic stories According to this particular article, Crawford is no longer perceived as 'auratic' at all, largely because she has ceased to be considered romantically desirable Her age, therefore, and the fact that she is at a point of change in her career, is certainly an issue here An article coinciding with her visit to Britain to work on *Esther Costello* constructs her image differently It notes that her recent films such as *Torch Song* (Charles Walters, 1953), *Johnny Guitar, Female on the Beach* (Joseph Pevney, 1955) and *Queen Bee* (Ranald MacDougall, 1955), are 'a long cry from the golden days of *Mildred Pierce* . and still longer from the days of *A Woman's Face* [George Cukor, 1941]', and suggests that they have not been worthy of her talent [25] Yet the overwhelming emphasis of the article is on her status as a 'Hollywood legend . one of Hollywood's Greats': '[She] has been, still is and always will be . . THE Joan Crawford . Stars have risen, stars have waned, but . . Crawford has remained, dazzling and indestructible ' The article attributes this to her 'intense dedication' and 'complete professionalism', well-known

aspects of her star persona from the heyday of her career Rather than emphasizing this time as a period of considerable change for Crawford, it glosses over these issues by stressing continuity

The construction of Crawford as a Hollywood legend was partly shaped by Hollywood's industrial reorganization and the decline of the star system at this time *Picturegoer* offered a complex construction of Hollywood in the 1950s which alternated on a weekly basis between headliners such as 'Hollywood goes Bust!' and 'Hollywood is Booming!', with television as the primary antagonist in this dramatic narrative A 1956 article 'Can Hollywood Survive?'[26] drew an evocative picture of Hollywood as a 'ghost town' with countless vacant studio lots As part of this, it paid particular attention to the star system. While the reduction in star contracts was a reality, what is interesting is the assumption that if the star system 'has had its day', this was partly due to a dearth of new talent. The magazine enquired 'where are the new generation of stars? . Hollywood's survival depends on your acceptance of a new crop of personalities', and similar conceptions circulated in the trade press at this time Joan Crawford, along with Humphrey Bogart and Clark Gable, is pictured as one of the 'Hollywood Greats', representative of the star system and the 'golden age' of yesteryear So while she was elsewhere constructed as a 'leading lady who has lasted a little too long',[27] there was concern that she (and her contemporaries) could not be replaced Rather than emphasize the decline of her career, Crawford's image is invoked to express a nostalgia for the past.

These discourses, specific to this historical moment in the industrial and cultural transformation of the cinema, are useful in contextualizing Crawford's construction in Britain at this time,[28] and how her television appearance drew upon, and contributed to this image. As in *Picturegoer*, Crawford is recognized as belonging to an earlier generation of stars when Peter Haigh asks her to explain how she helps the 'young actors and actresses of today'. It was in fact not Crawford but the young British actress, Heather Sears, who was the star of *Esther Costello* (as Crawford wistfully explained). Equally, however, Crawford was very clearly constructed as a Hollywood 'legend' by the programme, not least of all by Haigh's attitude towards her Before introducing the star he seems utterly in awe of her status and 'aura' as he makes the solemn announcement that 'this is a very proud moment for *Picture Parade'* and (in an unprecedented manner), at the end of the interview Crawford and Sears are presented with bouquets of flowers. Seated on the sofa (to the right of the screen), she wore a black sequined dress and gold necklace which glittered under the studio lights, and stood out starkly in television's modest aesthetic. *Picturegoer* had praised Crawford's belief in being 'a star *off* screen as well as *on'*,[29] and this is clearly supported by her television debut as she refers to the interview as

26 *Picturegoer*, 26 May 1956 p 8

27 *Picturegoer* 24 August 1957 p 9

28 Although the British press could certainly be unkind to stars their private lives were perhaps less the subject of extensive public knowledge It does not seem for example that there were any real British equivalents to American scandal magazines such as *Confidential*

29 *Picturegoer* 27 July 1956 p 12

'this performance', almost as though she is describing a part in a film. Her performance is certainly melodramatic When Haigh asks Crawford to describe the plot and theme of *Esther Costello* she does so very intensely She clasps her hands and looks to the ceiling, and in adopting a dramatic tone, she could almost be reciting her lines: 'a woman . . . goes back to Ireland, she left at six years of age . . and this is the story of *many, many* women in the world It doesn't have to be England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales '

Picture Parade and *Film Fanfare* were regularly criticized by the press for their tendency to eulogize the films and stars, and the cynical *Punch* paid particular attention to the Crawford interview The critic observed a 'melodramatic' rhetoric on a different level when it claimed that it 'expected the censors to step in at any moment with a ruling about the duration of screen hugs, kisses and the laying on of hands' [30] Perhaps playing down any questions over competitive rivalry, the 'kisses and the laying on of hands' are particularly apparent when Heather Sears appears (introduced by Crawford as 'the most lovely, beautiful child in the world') and Crawford keeps hugging and complimenting the young actress What is unfavourably received by *Punch* is the 'excess' of the occasion which is here conveyed through bodily gesture, a key attribute of melodrama as a genre and performance style. With the intensity of her physical movement and taught body language, this was, of course, a style with which Crawford was particularly associated and, as a result, her interview pushes the comparison with her film performance to its extreme The latter seems to come more naturally than the style required for television and she shifts uneasily between the two As noted previously, in exploring the possibilities of a domestic address, television pursued a relaxed informality, a key aspect of which was a 'rhetoric of *understatement*' [31] In adopting a style which, at times, is more resonant of classical Hollywood melodrama, Crawford's performance is clearly differentiated in its rejection of these understated codes.[32]

As Crawford performs her 'scene' in her glittering black dress, one of the reasons that she appears so striking is that her 'aura', her presence, is in fact far too *excessive* for television at this stage This not only relates to her performance style but also her costume, as her sparkling attire looks out of place in the domestic-type context in which she is situated In fact, it is similar to that worn in her films. Although its sleeveless, knee-length style is certainly more contemporary, it particularly recalls the black sequined dresses she wore in such films as *Humoresque* (Jean Negulesco, 1946) and *Possessed* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1947) In the 1930s, the glamorous nature of Crawford's costumes were a recognized element of her star persona, and this is replayed here to interesting effect As her sparkling dress differentiates her from Peter Haigh and Alfred Steele (who appeared for part of the interview), it recalls the way in which

30 *Punch* 28 August 1956, WAC BBC press cuttings box P662 If they were to continue to supply excerpts for the programmes the film industry had insisted upon a no criticism clause As a result, these programmes were continually dismissed as 'plugs by the British press and the issue remained a topic of debate throughout the decade

31 Corner *Popular Television in Britain* p 15

32 Robertson's *Guilty Pleasures* offers an interesting reading of Crawford s image in the 1950s in arguing that a number of factors worked to recode her image as camp' Notions of excess exaggeration and melodrama have been seen as intrinsically linked to a camp sensibility However it is difficult to ascertain whether a conception of campness is a retrospective reading and it is arguably Crawford's contrast with television s developing modes of address that is most pertinent here

33 Robert C Allen and Douglas Gomery *Film History Theory and Practice* (New York McGraw-Hill, 1985) p 183

34 Jane Ellen Wayne *Crawford s Men* (London Robson Books 1988), p 198 also noted in Considine *Bette and Joan* p 257

35 *Picturegoer*, 26 March 1955 p 18

36 *Picturegoer* 19 September 1953, p 25

37 John Caughie, Before the golden age early television drama in Corner (ed) *Popular Television in Britain* p 23

'visually . . her heroines overwhelmed their male counterparts' [33] This is particularly evident in the interview as it contrasts with the more subdued dress code of television

The clash of image and performance codes evident here can be interpreted in different ways. Crawford's appearance can be seen to evoke an older, more extravagant ideal of Hollywood glamour, and in offering an almost 'filmic' performance, it could imply that she is failing to adapt to the new television 'scene' and its implications for her profession. In the early 1950s Crawford had in fact campaigned against film stars appearing on television, branding those who did as 'traitors',[34] and while by 1956 she had evidently conceded to appear, it is apparent that she continued to cling to her status as a traditional Hollywood film star. How it was perceived by audiences at the time is of course open to question, but the visual appearance of the interview (television's more modest aesthetic, the setting, her costume), accentuates rather than depletes Crawford's glamour and her exceptional identity as a star.

However, while Crawford's 'aura' can be seen as too big for television, other aspects of her demeanour conflict with this. Discourses in *Picturegoer* are again useful here, as the fan magazine is one of few sources where contemporary discussions about film stars appearing on television are likely to be found. *Picturegoer* was a key arena in which the impact of television was argued and debated. Although by the mid 1950s the magazine was filled with news of celebrities moving across media boundaries (and its general coverage of television continued to increase), it suggested that film stars should regard television with caution, and jealously guard their cinematic status Television was invariably constructed as an inferior mode of employment for stars, both financially and in terms of prestige. The main problem, however, was seen to lie elsewhere:

> Film stars, forgivably egotistical, seem to be sucker-bait for personal appearances on TV. . . More often than not they appear to be just frightened amateurs A long way from the closed, controlled seclusion of the film studio, they writhe nervously, held in enormous and frequently unflattering close-up Yet they seem drawn to the business: they accept the challenge of TV without seeming to have understood its destructive implications.[35]

In contrast to *Film Fanfare*'s conception of the televisual closeup as 'unveiling' the star, *Picturegoer* describes it as 'unflattering'. This is seen to work in conjunction with how the star reacts to the camera, (elsewhere described by the magazine as a 'three-eyed monster slithering in for a close-up')[36] and it is television's *liveness* that is foregrounded here In television's early years liveness was seen, as John Caughie argues, as 'an essential characteristic and an aesthetic virtue of the medium rather than as a mere technological necessity'.[37] While television's use of filmed material increased as the 1950s

38 *Picturegoer*, 1 September 1957
p 13

39 Meeting between film industry
representatives and the BBC
1 July 1952 WAC T6/104/2

40 See *Film stars at the BBC*
"mike in *Picturegoer*
4 December 1948 pp 10–11 In
his discussion of the time
constraints of a film magazine
programme the producer is
apparently talking about a live
broadcast The BBC scripts
however indicate that the film
stars appearances on radio were
more often recorded and
transmitted at a later date

41 Ellis *Visible Fictions* pp 99–100

42 Corner *Popular Television in
Britain* p 12

43 12 August 1957 BBC Viewer
Research Reports WAC

progressed, a good deal of programming remained live at this time, and *Picture Parade* was transmitted live until the end of its run in 1962. *Picturegoer* describes the stars as nervous and uncomfortable, and live programming is perceived as a terrifying problem for celebrities not accustomed to such an aesthetic: 'stars who had no stage training and were not in the habit of acting more than two or three minutes at a time were scared silly of live TV and its split second demands'.[38] In 1952 the major American companies barred their stars from appearing on *Current Release* precisely because of this problem[39]

This raises issues about the specificity of the relations between film stars and television in the 1950s, although radio serves as an important qualification here. As noted, film stars had appeared on BBC radio for many years, whether in interviews, adaptations, or other items Although often recorded, it is likely that certain programmes were broadcast live[40] Yet in the discussion above, *Picturegoer* describes the stars' fears over live performances as a *new* problem, associated specifically with television Television's visual dimension of course rendered the stars' appearances much more 'exposed', and it begs a comparison with the film performance in ways that radio does not. Concerned with the visual specificity of the medium, John Ellis describes how the stars' film performance permits 'moments of pure voyeurism . the sense of overlooking something .. which passively allows itself to be seen', and this is inextricably related to the photo-effect of present-absence, the existence of the image in the *past* tense[41] Television coverage shifted this temporality, and this could be discerned at a visual level. A rhetoric of immediacy, direct address and an illusion of liveness continue to be central to television's address. Yet this is particularly important in the 1950s when the appearances were often literally live, as this had particular implications for the construction and reception of the film stars' performance

This is key in the case of the Crawford interview. The notion of current time is made clear when Haigh introduces her by explaining. 'I think I should tell you it's her first appearance on television ever', and after greeting the presenter, Crawford immediately admits that she is nervous and scared This acts as a kind of commentary on her performance which draws attention to the here and now, the fact that it was occurring in 'real time' So while Crawford eschews a televisual rhetoric of direct address and the 'implicitly shared'[42] – she seems almost to be in a world of her own, maintaining the distance of the film performance – television's liveness shapes her appearance in other ways A viewer research report on *Picture Parade* indicated that stars who were interviewed live in the studio were given 'more of a warm welcome' than those appearing on film, so the issue of liveness is certainly an important factor for viewers[43] It may suggest that a feeling of co-presence was created between viewer and star,

44 Lynn Spigel, 'Installing the television set popular discourses on television and domestic space 1946–1955 in *Private Screenings Television and the Female Consumer* p 14

45 12 June 1956 BBC viewer research reports, WAC

46 Ellis *Visible Fictions* p 99

47 Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* p 126

48 Benjamin, The work of art p 216

49 Ibid p 214

bringing them into closer contact The concept of co-presence was central in discourses on early viewing, discourses which negotiated television's links between public and private spaces. The viewer was often imagined as 'journeying' to the space on screen and experiencing 'a sense of "being there", a kind of *hyper*-realism'[44] (particularly important, for example, with regard to the live outside broadcast) Alternatively, co-presence could refer to television's ability to bring the public sphere *into* the home It is this latter conception that structures the responses to the live appearances on *Picture Parade* – the use of the term 'a warm welcome' implicitly evokes the notion of 'inviting' a guest into the home. It also draws on a rhetoric of familiarity, further reinforced by viewer's descriptions of how they 'enjoyed "meeting" all the stars',[45] suggesting a form of 'personal' contact. While the stars are also invited 'into' the home via radio, they are fragmented – 'a disembodied   voice'.[46] and the experience of co-existing in the same space is arguably accentuated by television's visual dimension.

This suggests a feeling of informality and closeness, and while it needs to be carefully balanced with strategies which maintained their *distance* and *difference*, this partly supports Marshall's argument that when appearing on television, the star may establish a 'more personal and familial . . personality' [47] For Marshall, it is the possibility of closeness that decontextualizes the star's aura In his discussion of contemporary late-night US talk shows cited previously, it is not only a direct address or the conversational discourse of the everyday that is seen as contributing to this shift, it is also the live transmission of the programmes – the stars' entrance into 'the current time of live television'. As acknowledged, it is possible that Marshall is drawing on Benjamin's belief that the 'social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura [is] the desire to bring things "closer"',[48] yet if the logic of Benjamin's wider argument is followed through, it would surely suggest that the live nature of television may make it *less* of a threat to the star's aura than film While the camera is still a substitute for the public, it nevertheless maintains the co-presence between audience and star more characteristic of theatre, and what Benjamin termed the 'presence of [the performer] in time and space' [49] While the responses to *Picture Parade* do indicate links between co-presence and 'familiarity' (supporting Marshall's argument), this cannot necessarily be equated with a decay in the star's 'aura' The viewer's descriptions of the programme above articulate this interaction in positive terms Rather than depleting their status and specialness, it adds to the viewer's pleasure and engagement with the star

In the case of Joan Crawford, however, it is perhaps indeed the case that the live nature of her performance undermines her 'auratic' status Yet this is not related to the liveness of her appearance *per se,* but the way in which this makes her very nervous. (According to

50 *Radio Times*, 8 February 1957
p 8

her biographers, Crawford had long-since been terrified of making personal and public appearances) This is evident through Haigh's interaction with her, for while he evidently feels that his meeting with Crawford is an honour, this is occasionally undercut by his interviewing technique. He was clearly aware of the extent of her nerves, as he later explained in the *Radio Times* that it took four hours to persuade Crawford to appear.[50] This shapes the way he approaches the interview, as he occasionally prompts her responses, sometimes before she has even had a chance to answer Particularly at the beginning of their talk, this gives the impression that Crawford requires encouragement and support, and that Haigh is himself nervous that she cannot carry off the interview It is also a strategy for limiting her 'performance', as due to the time constraints of live television he is eager to ensure the swift progression of the interview. Again, it is Crawford who is not accustomed to these conditions and while it is she that commands attention, it is Haigh who controls their exchange

Her unease about appearing on television is also clear from her body language In contrast to the wide-eyed, defiant look often adopted in her films, Crawford spends much of the interview with her gaze directed towards the floor, and only turns to acknowledge Haigh intermittently Crawford also wrings her hands, and when husband Alfred Steele appears she clings to him adoringly, and is evidently grateful for his supportive presence. As he leaves the set Crawford continues her coy performance, holding Steele in her gaze until he is out of sight. This demeanour offers a stark contrast to the strong, independent woman image constructed by her films, as does her general nervousness about appearing on television As a result, the interview replays the ordinary/extraordinary paradox which Dyer and Ellis suggest is so central to cinematic stardom. In much the same way as an interview in a fan magazine or on the radio, this is constructed first at a discursive level in that, although it focuses on her career and talent, it is punctuated by references to her 'perfectly ordinary life', and domestic identity as a wife and mother.[51] Yet on television this paradox is further layered at the level of performance Joan Crawford is 'extraordinary' in so far as she has an excessive presence of which the presenter is clearly in awe, yet she can be seen to be ordinary in that (like 'us'), she can feel nervous and vulnerable, feelings which she cannot control. When considering how this paradox is played out in different media forms it is clear that in the 1950s it could be shaped by the specificity of television, and its aesthetic and cultural development.

As the example of Joan Crawford suggests, although many stars refrained from addressing the camera directly, the interviews were nevertheless played out in a self-conscious manner which implicitly acknowledged the presence of the audience. This complicates the comparison made with the film performance, 'the sense of

51 According to Gomery and Allen in *Film History* publicity on Crawford s marriages often emphasized her domesticity p 180 While Steele expresses pride over Crawford's career and success he foregrounds her capacity to be a great wife and mother and to take care of [their] home'

overlooking something which is not designed for the onlooker but passively allows itself to be seen'.[52] There were certain stars who, although not acknowledging the camera for the duration of the interview, would address the viewer directly at the beginning and the end in unison with the presenter. Particularly striking examples are Macdonald Hobley's interview with Phyllis Kirk, the star of the early 3-D film *The House of Wax* (Andre de Toth, 1953), and Peter Noble's talk to the young British actress, Sally Ann Howes, appearing in the comedy *The Admirable Crichton* (Lewis Gilbert, 1957) In both examples presenter and star are positioned in a two-shot in which we are partly viewing them from the side The stars then address the camera and utter a very polite 'good evening', before turning their attention to the presenter's questions. The interviews then progress through the interaction between presenter and star, and the viewer is returned to the position of the ideal (or 'invisible') observer On the occasions when stars did address the camera this could be deliberate and confident (in the case of Sally Ann Howes, for example) Yet it could also be awkward and hesitant, as though they were unsure where to look, or which camera to address (an example being the introduction of Heather Sears in the Joan Crawford interview) This, of course, conflicted with the filmic performance when a direct address is taboo, and the stars could thus exhibit an uneasy relation with the television camera – *Picturegoer*'s 'three-eyed-monster slithering in for a close-up' – and its mediation between them and the viewer

This intermittent direct address was also apparent in *Film Fanfare*'s panel quiz, in which stars competed to answer viewer's questions on film trivia The presenter always requested that each of the stars say goodnight individually, addressing the camera one by one While conforming to the polite and mannered address pursued by television, this also enabled the 'presence' of the viewer, a third party, to be visibly encoded in the text in a self-conscious manner Such strategies are much more evident in this early period and they carry the hallmark of a new technology, not only in terms of how the presenter and star perform, but in their acute awareness of being watched, and the fact that this is the sole reason for their interaction

This inherent self-consciousness perhaps conflicted with or destabilized the attempt to construct an informal and relaxed relation between presenter and star, and this tension is further apparent in the way the stars are introduced to the audience They are required to tell their 'story' – explain where they have trained and in which films they have appeared, and this discursive structure is by no means redundant in contemporary celebrity interviews. Yet aspects of this narrative logic are inflected in different ways in the 1950s It was almost as though because the stars were being presented through a new medium, they had to be introduced to a *new* audience This is despite the fact that by 1956, when television set ownership was

more widespread, television and cinema audiences were indistinguishable The general discussion of the stars was indicative of a certain 'knowingness', a shared knowledge of British film culture, as Peter Noble's 'gossip spot' makes clear From the viewer's perspective, this may have contrasted with the star's actual physical appearance in which they were sometimes presented as almost 'strangers', and this further rests in tension with the attempt to construct the star as a more familiar personality.

With respect to the more general content of the interviews, the stars were frequently asked about their future or current career plans and television drew upon existing formats in fan magazines and radio. Fan magazines foreground the 'star-as-worker' more than other media (the press, for example),[53] and television continued this trend With British actors and actresses a subject raised was often work in theatre (which medium did they prefer? How did they differ?), and these concerns were evidently common at the time According to BBC audience research, a number of viewers found such discussions repetitive and uninteresting, implying that even in these early years the interviews were certainly watched with a critical eye Some respondents were apparently 'rather blasé about film personalities as a whole – "one knows in advance that all film stars are going to say how happy they are and how much they enjoyed working with so and so"'.[54] Expressed two years after *Picture Parade* began, this also suggests the increasing conventionalization of the television interview and a familiarity with its general rhetoric

The focus on the stars' career raises the question of how television regulated extratextual knowledge of the star, as there were strict boundaries around what could be discussed By 1957 the trade press and fan magazines often complained that the interviews were too polite and lacked controversy, and the editor of *Picturegoer* observed a 'monotony of praise', as 'every starlet who appears is "fabulous" or "astonishing" [and] interviews are crammed with flattering platitudes'[55] Although the film industry's 'no criticism' clause had arguably encouraged the programmes to avoid any controversy at all, the above responses were partly prompted by the growing number of current affairs programmes (such as *Tonight* [BBC, 1957–65] and *This Week* [ITV, 1956–78, 1986–92) which were developing more investigative techniques As the example of Joan Crawford suggests, the programmes demonstrated an apparent respect for the stars' private lives and thus how much of the 'star-as-person' would be revealed *Picturegoer* criticized the interviews for failing to search for the 'facts': 'nobody ever asks about money on television, it just isn't done Nobody asks Sinatra if he and Eva are going to patch it up, or if Bacall is really the one,'[56] and it attributes this to the need to cater to a family audience The way in which television is singled out for criticism here implies that it offered a tamer interview – in terms of extratextual knowledge of the star – than those

53 Ibid p 96

54 23 June 1958 BBC Viewer Research Reports WAC

55 *Kine Weekly* 2 August 1956, p 6

56 *Picturegoer* 26 October 1957 p 15

57 Film Talks for *Women's Hour*
8 October 1951 WAC
R51/173/5

previously constructed by the press, fan magazines or on radio. This was not necessarily the case, and *Picturegoer*'s criticism is perhaps shaped more by its ambivalence towards television at this time On radio, the BBC had maintained strict parameters around the material for star interviews, as illustrated by the material used in *Women's Hour* which offered 'biographies of the film stars' focusing on 'their artistic careers rather than their private lives' [57] A focus on the stars' 'private lives' was evidently perceived as 'gossip', low-brow and sensationalist, and incompatible with the principles of public service.

As the articles on Joan Crawford make clear, *Picturegoer* also presented a very conservative image of the star and had similarly avoided indulging in 'lurid gossip'. However, perhaps partly influenced by the rhetoric of American scandal magazines, by the late 1950s *Picturegoer* made an attempt to shift these boundaries. In a bid to stem its declining readership (and address its increasingly youthful audience) it began to publish more daring headlines which promised the 'shocking truth' or some such revelation about various stars Seldom was anything actually revealed, yet it is significant that such 'scandalous' constructions were partly in competition with television. After all, if television contributed to the decline in cinema attendance, this then affected *Picturegoer*'s circulation, and the magazine thus promised more of the 'star-as-person' as television could, or chose to, offer. So while the fan magazine contributed to wider intertextual discourses which interacted with the construction of a star's television appearance, it was also in competition with the new medium Television impacted upon the magazine's discursive construction of the film star and its mediation of their 'private' and 'public' selves. In an attempt to stress the integrity of the BBC, *Picture Parade*'s Peter Haigh emphasized that although the interviews were not strictly rehearsed, 'the stars knew that personal or rude questions would not be asked . . that is not the way we work A personal and private life should be treated as such.'[58]

58 *Radio Times*, 8 February 1957
p 5

Thus in the context of *Film Fanfare*'s assertion that television offers the star 'as they really are, and in closeup', while its visual proximity was clear, television's discursive access to the star was very carefully managed, particularly with respect to their offscreen lives. Although *Film Fanfare* promised a privileged glimpse of the star outside their 'big screen roles', television in fact offered a further performance which interacted with the film text (and other intertexts) in complex ways From the film industry's perspective, the interviews were a form of publicity, and publicity is 'often taken to give privileged access to the real person of the star' [59] Television adopted strategies which pre-existed in other media forms, while it also offered something new, most centrally at the level of performance Perhaps part of the interest in watching these early interviews was related to reading the star on another level, observing how they adapted to, and performed on the medium with the new

59 Dyer, *Stars* p 90

demands it brought to bear In this respect, it was indeed offering a new perspective on the film star – would they act calm and relaxed like Terence Morgan, or be gripped by nerves like Joan Crawford?

When appearing on television, the question of whether film stars 'establish a more familiar and public personality'[60] which depletes their aura, is a crucial one, raising as it does important issues about the increasing domestication of film culture, and the shift of film stars to the home In locating this question within a particular historical framework, it becomes clear that it is important to understand how these television appearances emerged, and the technological, aesthetic and cultural factors which shaped their early development

Television's mediation of the star's 'aura' was complex and contradictory, and stars adapted to, and performed on, television in different ways, so any general conclusions are tentative. While there was an attempt to pull the star into a more informal and familiar rhetoric, the results were often unstable and intermittent, and a range of strategies worked towards maintaining the star's aloofness, distance and difference. This dialectic between distance and proximity, informal yet aloof, exemplifies the way in which 'star images are paradoxical . . . composed of elements that do not cohere, of contradictory tendencies'.[61] This was less a binary opposition than a shifting register of performance styles. The possibility of television making the star seem less 'distant' and more accessible – having the 'star-in-movement' *in* the home, is significant Yet this interaction is more complex than Marshall suggests, particularly when a clear-cut division between the filmic and television performance is problematic The prevailing assumption that television depletes the 'aura' of the film star is based as much on the general perception that television 'reduces' the 'cinematic', as it is on the specificities of Benjamin's argument. It seems crucial, then, that in the 1950s, the star's difference and presence, their 'exceptional' nature, was actually *enhanced* by the 'primitive' visual aesthetic of early television – the quality of the image, the lighting and the size of the screen.

While the central paradox of stardom, that of being constituted as ordinary yet extraordinary, was partly modeled on conventions established by other media, television reshaped it within the specificity of its textual form. Its setting, liveness, 'newness', and the emerging conventions of a televisual mode of address, all layered this dialectic at the level of performance, and this contributes to an understanding of how different intertexts inflect the paradox of stardom in different ways. These possibilities seem particularly pertinent in the 1950s when regular consumption of the star's 'big screen roles' was in decline Available evidence suggests that as the decade progressed and cinema attendance continued to fall, many viewers used these programmes as their primary experience of film culture.[62] This complicates the relegation of intertexts to 'subsidiary'

60 Marshall *Celebrity and Power* p 126

61 Ellis *Visible Fictions* p 93

62 This is mentioned in most of the BBC Viewer Research reports on *Picture Parade* See for example the report dated 12 August 1957 viewers enjoyed the programme very much – irrespective of whether they [are]   regular picturegoers or not   [They] obviously find it pleasant to be kept in touch with who s who [in film]

forms of circulation as it is precisely at this point that filmgoing (and indeed the cultural significance of the cinema), undergoes important transformations In fact, it could be argued that the late 1950s represents the 'golden age' of the film programme, and thus British television's coverage of film stars. The genre was associated with a cultural significance and popularity that it has not enjoyed since, for while the cinema's appeal as a mass medium was in decline, it continued to retain an important place in everyday life and cultural consciousness for much of the decade As a result, film stars pervaded the domestic sphere via the small screen, offering what one early viewer described as a new form of 'cinema pleasure'.[63]

reports
and
debates

special debate:

Trauma and Screen Studies: opening the debate

SUSANNAH RADSTONE

In September 1999, Katharine Hodgkin and I organized an international conference, 'Frontiers of Memory' Our aim was to bring together an international and interdisciplinary group of memory scholars, and to raise questions about the fascination which memory holds for contemporary humanities scholarship as well as for western culture more generally [1] Our hope was that the conference would enable a degree of reflexivity about its own practices and concerns – that it would revel in its size and in its shared intellectual passions, while asking how it is that so many of us are sharing this fascination and what this might mean both intellectually, historically and culturally?

Once we began to read the vast numbers of proposals, our sense of a hierarchy of fascination within memory studies hardened into certainty Many of the abstracts we received mobilized the concepts of trauma, dissociation and unrepresentability, and were informed by the work of Shoshana Felman and Don Laub, and Cathy Caruth.[2] We received so many, and such similar, abstracts from scholars working on trauma that our responses became somewhat jaded. Though this might partly be explained by the sheer difficulty of reading so many accounts touching on catastrophic experiences, I want to retain both my sense of the apparently unquestioned dominance of this particular approach to trauma and also my sense

that its popularity – the apparently oxymoronic 'popularity' of trauma – is a phenomenon begging analysis Unlike panels at most conferences with which I – and you, I am sure – are familiar, the emotional atmosphere in 'trauma' panels excludes much of the usual cut and thrust of academic parrying and debate. The suffering that is frequently manifested seems to render such responses inappropriate Yet though the suffering that is touched on in academic work on trauma is important, I remain concerned about the silencing of debate that work on trauma appears to produce and I want to raise the possibility that trauma may have become a 'popular cultural script' in need of contextualization and analysis in its own right – a symptom, the cause of which needs to be sought elsewhere.[3]

3 This is the analysis that I try to pursue in my Screening trauma Forrest Gump, film and memory' in Radstone (ed) Memory and Methodology, and in Testimonies psychic law and social order, in the Cultural Values special issue on Testimonial Cultures vol 5 no 1 (2001) it is a question that Thomas Elsaesser also takes up in his contribution to this dossier

Though 'Frontiers of Memory' aimed at a thorough-going interdisciplinarity within its panels, a number of the abstracts lent themselves well to a panel on 'trauma and film'. In the interests of prompting debate concerning the use of trauma in Screen Studies, we decided to programme my own critique of the use of a particular trauma theory alongside papers by E Ann Kaplan and Janet Walker, whose analyses might, we thought, mobilize that trauma theory with less ambivalence

Like the other 'trauma' panels at the conference and to the detriment of other fascinating and excellent panels on, for instance, politics and popular memory, against which it was scheduled, the 'trauma and film' panel was full to bursting, albeit that it was scheduled first thing on Sunday morning Though the panel did not produce the Screen Studies-inflected debate about 'why trauma?' and 'which theory of trauma?' that we had hoped might be sparked, the discussion did raise some questions, which, in their deceptive simplicity, went right to the heart of issues that seem to have been elided in the more general rush to trauma. These are elisions that Screen Studies might yet avoid is there a relation between screen media and trauma? if so, where should Screen Studies scholarship begin its analysis of this relation? should such analysis take its impetus from texts, and if so, should the focus fall primarily on narration, or on mise-en-scene or on editing and so on? Or does trauma make itself felt in (for can one say mark?) these media in the relation between their texts and their spectators – and if so, then how?

4 Paul Grainge is currently editing a book on popular memory and film that will include some discussion of trauma E Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang are currently co-editing a book on trauma and film, Thomas Elsaesser is writing a book on trauma and German national cinema Janet Walker is writing a book on trauma cinema

As I write, essays, monographs and collections on trauma and cinema are about to appear[4] This 'trauma dossier' has been compiled in the hope that it will open a debate about trauma and the cinema, trauma and television, and trauma and new electronic media, before the trauma theories already dominant within literary studies and history subjugate Screen Studies too The contributors include E Ann Kaplan and Janet Walker, both of whom are currently working on books addressing cinema and trauma and who, after speaking at 'Frontiers of Memory'. agreed to write new contributions for this

dossier. In addition, there are contributions from Thomas Elsaesser, whose work on a forthcoming book on New German Cinema has prompted his engagement with trauma, and Maureen Turim, who returns here to what must now be acknowledged as a prefigurative discussion of trauma and cinema.[5]

5   See her chapter subsection on Holocaust flashbacks trauma and repression in Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film Memory and History* (New York and London Routledge 1989) pp 231–42

Elsaesser's contribution raises what seems to me to be the essential issue concerning the 'rise' of trauma, for he suggests that trauma's field of referral (a problematic phrase, in itself) ought not to be restricted to its more usual application: that of particular and specific responses/representations prompted by (another problematic phrase) a devastating event Elsaesser suggests, rather, that the term's salience is due less to its 'referral' to catastrophic events – a referral that is both signified and put in crisis by the term itself – than to the revised understandings of referentiality it prompts As he concludes, 'trauma theory is not so much a theory of recovered memory as it is one of recovered referentiality', that acknowledges that 'there is no there there'.[6] It is the space trauma provides for the consideration, rather than the foreclosure of such apparent paradoxes, I would add, that arguably constitutes the concept's value But Elsaesser's helpful intervention raises a number of questions concerning whether or not trauma is 'generalizable' For example, whether the more comprehensive revisions to our understandings of referentiality and interpretation that can be prompted by trauma implicitly refer back either to a qualitatively particular response or to a qualitatively particular type of event (much trauma theory hovers between or elides these two understandings of the term), or does trauma's (generalizable?) salience arise from the crisis posed to realism by 'holocaustal events'?[7] Does trauma theory answer to a growing acknowledgement that, if you like, there never was anything 'there', or does trauma (perhaps unhelpfully) carry with it the implication that only sometimes and under certain conditions is there 'no there there'? Or does it answer to a new historical/cultural context in which there is 'no there there'? And if so, whose context, precisely, is that? Or have the refigurations of 'modern' space and time performed by contemporary electronic technologies produced tectonic shifts that only 'trauma' can describe? These are not questions that can easily be resolved but they are questions best worked through, I think, as concretely and specifically as possible, and where better than Screen Studies which, since its inception, has meditated on the illusory but shocking indexical 'thereness' of the moving visual image?

6   See Thomas Elsaesser's final paragraph in this dossier

7   Hayden White 'The modernist event in Vivian Sobchack (ed) *The Persistence of History Cinema Television and the Modern Event* (New York and London Routledge 1996)

As Elsaesser points out, trauma theory revises rather than recovers theories of referentiality more specifically, it prompts a re-thinking of the relation between cinema, film, memory and history, and insists that film theorists bring trauma theory's insights concerning latency and belatedness to the question why this film now? Yet must or should this welcome attention to memory and history prompt a

8 Kevin Toolis Shock tactics
   Guardian Weekend 13 November
   1999, pp 27–36

9 See Caruth (ed) *Trauma
   Explorations in Memory* Caruth
   *Unclaimed Experience Trauma
   Narrative and History*

10 Fredric Jameson s account was
   one of the first to associate
   postmodernism with
   depthlessness See Fredric
   Jameson Postmodernism, or the
   cultural logic of late capitalism
   New Left Review, no 146 (1984)
   pp 53–92
11 This is the argument that I try to
   flesh out in Screening trauma
12 My current book project *On
   Memory and Confession* explores
   questions of subjectivity
   temporality and sexual difference

retreat from film theory's imbrication with questions of fantasy and spectatorship? In the USA, a vast increase in litigation on grounds of post-traumatic stress disorder has been due, in no small measure, to US psychiatry's knowing and intentional revision of PTSD's definition: amongst all the classified psychiatric illnesses 'only PTSD can be causally linked to a specific event'.[8] Fantasy's imbrication with psychic life and the agency of psychical mediation has been sidelined, one might suggest in the interests of litigatory clarity – a move that raises questions too complex to address here concerning contemporary cultures of responsibility and victimhood. Yet I suggest these moves need to be borne in mind, lest screen theory allows itself to be swept along by a theory whose political and cultural contexts demand interrogation Too enthusiastic a takeup of trauma risks displacing the important insights from film theory concerning spectatorship, mediation and fantasy insights that enabled a revision of earlier media theory's positing of spectatorship's essential passivity Trauma theory runs the risk of returning Screen Studies to that model of passive spectatorship, and the retention of fantasy may be our best insurance against such an outcome. But can fantasy's significance be retained in the context of trauma theory's insistence on dissociation and the closing-down of the traumatized mind's capacity for association? The answer to this question depends upon which 'trauma theory' becomes influential within Screen Studies, and, contrary to appearances, there is debate to be had about how trauma is to be conceptualized and with reference to which bodies of work. The trauma theory imported into the humanities via Felman, Laub and Caruth[9] is shaped, I think, by more general developments in US psychoanalysis characterized by what some would see as a postmodern move away from models of the mind that conceive of a 'surface' consciousness and a subterranean unconscious (otherwise known as a depth model)[10] and from the understanding that fantasy is the motor of psychical life and subjective meaning This is not a path that has to be followed. There are other routes one might take. routes that might allow the rethinking of the relation between trauma, memory and fantasy [11] Trauma could revise theories of spectatorship by considering the relations between fantasy, memory, temporality and the subject [12] Moreover screen theory's history has prepared it well for pursuing such a path, but right now, I think it is the path least likely to be taken

Each of the contributions which follow makes moves towards opening up a debate about how trauma might illuminate Screen Studies Elsaesser acknowledges the risk that trauma might become a catch-all, while presenting a case for the concept's potential to illuminate questions of referentiality, hermeneutics and interpretation across Screen Studies Kaplan points out that like film melodrama, the term trauma has its roots in the nineteenth century and was developed in association with industrialization, the oppression of

women in the bourgeois family and colonization Her contribution revises approaches to melodrama developed in the 1970s and 1980s by suggesting that 'Hollywood melodramas endlessly repeat family and war traumas and recoveries'. Kaplan sees an association between trauma and melodrama's straddling of the domains of history and fantasy – an association that suggests a privileged relation between melodrama and the representation and analysis of cultural trauma Her contribution concludes, however, by comparing the spectatorial positions towards trauma offered by melodrama with those set in train by, for instance, independent cinema, horror films and news coverage

Like Elsaesser, who suggested that trauma's belatedness might be suggestive in relation to the question 'why this film now?', Maureen Turim suggests that an attention to trauma might nuance analyses of cinema's mediation of the present as well as the past. Turim's intervention suggests some important revisions to understandings of trauma and is informed by some less usually referenced psychoanalytic writings on traumatic memory which promise to shed fresh light on both trauma and its cinematic representation Turim links trauma not simply with the impact of external events, but with the ensuing internal conflict between the pre-traumatized and the traumatized self. For Turim, trauma is understood, moreover as the layering of several experiences one upon the other, rather than as the impact of a single event. Importantly, Turim's film analysis also suggests that unintegrated traumatic memories may impede recognition of present traumas. The part trauma films may play in their spectators' integration of individual and collective traumas may therefore mitigate traumatized isolation and create empathy with the sufferings of others in the present

While Maureen Turim associates trauma with modernist film aesthetics and discusses films from the 1950s and 1960s, Janet Walker argues that the 1980s and 1990s have seen the development of a 'trauma cinema' dealing with world-shattering public or personal events Unlike Elsaesser, Walker does link trauma cinema with traumatic events, rather than with a more generalizable crisis in representation In an argument a little reminiscent of Robert Rosenstone's suggestion that historians might learn how to produce poststructuralist historiography by studying contemporary film,[13] Walker's thesis, which posits a relation between trauma, memory and fantasy, points to what history might learn from contemporary trauma cinema For Walker, what trauma cinema demonstrates is traumatic memory's straddling of the categories of 'true' and 'false', 'fantasy' and 'memory', 'documentary' and 'fiction'. Yet this straddling of categories is instructive, she suggests, not because it reveals the instability of memory, but because it underlines the tropes by means of which traumatic memory's correspondence to historical experience can be traced For Walker, revelations of the authenticity and

13 See for instance Robert A Rosenstone, The future of the past film and the beginnings of postmodern history', in Sobchack, The Persistence of History for similar discussions of the relation between history and contemporary cinema see also American History Review vol 93 no 5 (1988)

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that trauma might become too handy a catch-all. In opening up a
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mind the shadow it may cast over other theories, concepts and ideas
no less valuable.

Postmodernism as mourning work

THOMAS ELSAESSER

Trauma theory

My interest in this topic has arisen from a renewed – or perhaps
belated – re-reading of some of the key filmmakers of the so-called
New German Cinema, an art cinema about which I wrote a book not
centred on the famous auteurs.[1] I had always meant to follow it up
with a study on some of the major directors, in the context of their
relation to Germany's Nazi past. Chapters of this project have been
published over the years on H J Syberberg, Wim Wenders, Werner
Herzog, Herbert Achternbusch and Harun Farocki, and I have also
published a book-length essay on Rainer Werner Fassbinder[2] In the
latter, especially, I was concerned with the marking of the relation
between Germans and Jews by the always deferred 'mourning work'
of the German nation for the victims of the Holocaust I resumed the
topic of mourning work in another context. A made-for-TV movie
from 1997 about the 'Hot Autumn' of 1977 and the Red Army
Faction showed how major shifts of memory and reversals of

1 Thomas Elsaesser *New German
Cinema a History* (London and
Basingstoke British Film Institute
and Macmillan 1989)

2 Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder s
Germany History Identity Subject*
(Amsterdam Amsterdam
University Press 1996)

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3 Thomas Elsaesser Antigone Agonistes urban guerilla or guerilla urbanism? The RAF, Germany in Autumn and Death Game', in Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin (eds), Giving Ground the Politics of Propinquity (London Verso 1999) pp 267–302

4 Thomas Elsaesser,'Melancolie et mimetisme les enigmes d'Alexander Kluge Trafic no 31 (Autumn 1999), pp 70–94

5 Susannah Radstone 'Screening trauma Forrest Gump, film and memory, in Memory and Methodology (New York and Oxford Berg 2000)

6 See the essays in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (eds) Tense Past Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory (New York and London Routledge 1996)

speaking positions had given those traumatic events a quite different place in the nation's imaginary [3] In 1998, the French film journal *Trafic* asked me for an article on Alexander Kluge, which revolves around the idea of 'absence as presence, presence as parapraxis'. I tried to track the deliberate slips in the work of a filmmaker who talks about everything under the sun, but who does his mourning work in silence.[4] What follows here are stray thoughts for an introductory chapter to a book that might bring these various efforts together. In order to mark my point of departure and cover some ground in mapping what to me has become a vast terrain, I shall be obliged to take some short cuts The most egregious is my reference to something I call 'trauma theory' and which – confusingly – acts both as a launch-pad and a landing stage. It subsumes on the one hand the body of thought around the experience of Holocaust survivors, the clinical case histories around post-traumatic stress disorders and the public debates around the so-called 'memory wars' (recovered memory syndrome). On the other hand, it names and associates itself with an ongoing effort in the humanities – for me represented in paradigmatic fashion by the writings of Cathy Caruth and Susannah Radstone – to probe these divergent issues and cultural interventions analytically in order to put forward an important agenda for, respectively, literary theory and Film and Television Studies

As Susannah Radstone has convincingly argued, trauma theory is the response, mainly in the academic community, to a number of deadlocks and aporias in the humanities.[5] For instance, it both redefines and challenges the use of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic tool for the interpretation of texts, and as a critical interventionist strategy for a politics of the body Against the emphasis on fantasy in orthodox Freudian theory (as well as in *Screen* theory), trauma theorists want to stress memory and history They want to articulate a theory of the subject not around desire and its constitutive lack (the Freud-Lacanian route), but around memory and its – politically enforced, patriarchally inflicted – gaps, absences and traceless traces In its most general sense, this trauma theory is a theory of victimhood and a politics of blame, in which various ethnic, gender or sexual preference groups vie (sometimes with each other) for a place in the sun of righteous indignation (or lucrative litigation).[6]

In its more academically respectable form, trauma theory is trying to redefine important theoretical and political ground about the status of fantasy (once thought of as the motor of political action – the May 68 slogan of *l'imagination au pouvoir* – now the engine that drives consumerism) and the crisis of referentiality (in its Derridean articulation or in its neo-Platonic *Matrix* form). To the extent that this also implies the crisis of indexicality with regards to the photographic mode of the moving image, it is of both (high-) theoretical and (new media-) pragmatic interest to film scholars –

even to those not primarily concerned with film texts that represent military, genocidal or national-ethnic traumatic events.

Thus, on any account, the potential scope of trauma theory extends well beyond grappling with the Holocaust and its aftermath, as it figures, for instance, in my project around the New German Cinema mentioned above. In fact, the two may have very little in common Or rather, both the persistence of the Holocaust debates in European cinema and the emergence of trauma theory in the international scholarly community are symptoms for which the causes may have to be sought elsewhere. Nonetheless, the notion of victimhood, the emphasis on history and power(lessness), the anxiety about memory, its ambiguous relation to an inner psychic reality and to an outer, public (or cinematic) representation, all tend to align trauma theory and the various post-World War II historical-political leftovers. Several distinct issues can be identified that the body of work I call trauma theory addresses in this conjuncture. They can give a sense of why trauma has become such an abiding concern also in the humanities as to necessitate the development of a new paradigm Among these, I want to briefly touch on the complex trauma, trace and latency, the question of how to represent the unrepresentable, which to my mind seem to involve both the (psychic) temporality of belatedness and a different relation of narrative to (individual) agency. My final comments will try to situate these specific concerns in a broader hermeneutic perspective.

Trauma, trace and latency: narrative and testimony

Since the issue of latency bears most directly on the Holocaust (it suggests that traumatic events – traumatic both for specific individuals as well as for a culture's understanding of itself – involve a so-called 'latency' period), I shall not comment on it further, except to refer to another essay of mine,[7] where I try to show across a number of films, such as Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* (1984), Claude Lanzman's *Shoah* (1985) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), that accepting the latency hypothesis as significant for filmmaking almost necessitates a theory of trauma, in order to understand the nature of the delays (the displacements of an event and its representation) and to be able to pose the question: why this or that film *now*?

What emerges is that trauma's non-representability is both subjective (trauma makes failure of memory significant) and objective (trauma makes of representation a significant failure), confirming that traumatic events for contemporary culture turn around the question of how to represent the unrepresentable, or how – in Samuel Beckett's words – to name the unnamable. This has been the traditional 'literary' response ('poetry after Auschwitz is

8 The phrase alludes to Saul
Friedlander *Probing the Limits of
Representation* (Cambridge MA
Harvard University Press 1992)

9 Cathy Caruth *Unclaimed
Experience Trauma Narrative
and History* (Baltimore MD
Johns Hopkins University Press
1996)

10 On the issue of recovered
memory syndrome and the
debate about post-traumatic
stress disorder, see Antze and
Lambek (eds) *Tense Past* I found
their Introduction, and Ian
Hacking *Memory sciences
memory politics*, to be especially
illuminating

barbaric') and to some extent, has also underpinned the *Bilderverbot* with respect to films, especially narrative fiction films. But here, trauma theory might be seen to break the traditional deadlock around the 'limits of representation',[8] opening up a new space of theoretical displacement. Caruth's work, for instance, has a different take on the question of representation, arguing (for instance, in her chapters on *Hiroshima mon Amour* and Heinrich von Kleist) in post-Paul de Mannian, deconstructive fashion, that if trauma is the name of an event that does not leave visible traces, these non-traces are nonetheless recoverable by a different kind of hermeneutics[9]

Caruth reminds us that in Freud, for instance, latency is above all connected to infantile sexuality and involves two scenes. the first is 'sexual in content' but is not given 'sexual meaning', the second is 'non-sexual in content' but has sexual meaning.[10] But apart from raising questions of power and the collusive or latent violence of the family bond, trauma theory in this area also addresses a shift of perception and meaning, which makes trauma something not assimilated, an experience not integrated into the psychic economy of a subject Caruth can therefore argue that the overcoming or mastery of trauma must involve processes of 'integration' and 'assimilation' Foremost among these processes (or 'techniques') of integration would be narrative and the ability to tell a (one's) story, where the narrator is fully present to him- or herself in the act of telling This gives to trauma theory a double set of objectives, but also of historical tasks. on the one hand, it opens up trauma theory to the experience and memory of events other than public-historical ones, as in personal memoirs, autobiography, testimony or family history On the other hand, it defines traumas such as the Vietnam War or ethnic cleansing in the Balkans as an issue of narrative – of telling and listening – within the terms of which its relation to subjectivity, history and memory can best be addressed.

It is here that the media, and in particular television, have played an especially outstanding but also controversial role. In the format of the talk show, television has shaped an entire culture of confession and witnessing, of exposure and self-exposure, which in many ways – good and bad – seems to have taken over from both religion and the welfare state. In a sense, it has made trauma theory the recto, and therapeutic television (also disparagingly called trash TV) the verso of democracy's failure to 'represent' its citizens' personal concern in the public sphere. It also points up the credibility gap of much Judaeo-Christian religion when it comes to sustain as 'healing' the rituals of mediation that used to insert the private into the symbolic order

At the same time, a similar failure of mediation between subjectivity and history has also given birth to an entirely different film culture, which especially, but not only, in Europe has transformed the way history is represented in the cinema. Films –

some mainstream, some produced with and for television – have proved to be a most extraordinary instrument for giving shape, texture and voice to a 'history from below' or 'everyday history', at once authenticating 'lived experience' through the power of immediacy inherent in the moving image, and demonstrating the cinema's capacity to 'fake' such authenticity through the stylistic-narrational techniques of editing sounds and images. This double role has 'traumatized' both documentary and feature filmmaking – well before the advent of the digital image gave it a further twist, confirming the now definitively 'traumatic' status of the moving image in our culture as the symptom without a cause, as the event without a trace

Temporality and belatedness

Linking trauma to latency and narrative extends its scope beyond the sexual, to include as one of its key features temporality, or rather the difference between psychic temporality and linear chronological time. Trauma theory would here be concerned with the rival claims of memory time and historical time, and their respective relation to perception, to self-awareness and the subjectivity of media-experience 'Trauma' thus not only names the delay between an event and its (persistent, obsessive) return, but also a reversal of affect and meaning across this gap in time.[11] The thrill of equivocation (part of its spectacle value) derives from a cognitive-emotive hesitancy, which can be phrased theoretically does the recurrent, repetitive aspect of the media's treatment of (historic, public, shocking) events relate to the obsessive time of (subjective) trauma-memory, or is obsessive repetition in fact the media's (and popular culture's) most 'authentic' temporality and time-regime? If the latter, then repetition becomes part of creating in the spectator not just 'prosthetic memory' but prosthetic trauma, deliberately or inadvertently setting up a gap between the (visual, somatic) impact of an event or image and the (the media's) ability to make sense of it, in order to make it enter into the order of the comprehensible and translating it into discourse In a sense, and perhaps most intriguingly for the literary or film scholar, trauma theory puts at issue the temporality of the traumatic event Besides involving repetition and iteration, the traumatic event intimately links several temporalities, making them coexist within the same perceptual or somatic field, so much so that the very distinction between psychic time and chronological time seems suspended.

This is why another Freudian concept, having to do with shifts in temporality and space, has often been associated with trauma, namely Freud's *Nachtraglichkeit*, usually translated as belatedness, or deferred action As Caruth writes. 'Trauma is fully evident only in

12 Cathy Caruth (ed) *Trauma Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore MD Johns Hopkins University Press 1992), p 8

connection with another place and another time. Belatedness neither inside nor outside, neither one place nor one time '[12] Yet *Nachtraglichkeit* is itself an aspect of a wider epistemological issue, the subject's need to invoke – or invent – an origin or absent cause in order to explain how one knows what one knows, in relation to an event or a course of action, but also in relation to the subject's self-awareness of his or her identity It is in this sense that Lacan speaks of the *après-coup* as the act of the subject filling a void or a gap in his/her identity, by providing a causal-chronological sequence or a chain of signifiers, to assure him/herself of a spatio-temporal consistency and a place in the symbolic order.

In this respect, trauma theory revives debates around the definition of subjectivity and history What contemporary trauma theory tries to re-think is the relation of subjectivity to history, across the act of narration, in which witnessing and personal testimony are in some sense both crucial and highly problematic Crucial in that participants, especially in the 'memory wars', are often embroiled in wanting to claim: 'My (act of) testimony is my truth, my bearing of witness is my claim to both truth and to the terms of my experience' Problematic, in that such a truth is specific and local, but it may lack narratives Or it may lack witnesses who corroborate my truth, there may be no confessors or narratees, no-one to listen In this sense, the dilemma of the Holocaust witness becomes paradigmatic but also historically unique, that is, it would be the limit case of more recent (and some would argue, more banal) instances of personal witnessing and story-telling. But television talk shows and media confessions (with their implied invocation of an [absent] third party) insist, be it in the idiom of popular culture and commerce, on the changing dynamics of social subjectivity and citizenship in the media age. To relate this kind of witnessing to trauma is also to establish a link between public event and private impact, across body and voice as instruments of an (incomplete) inscription of this subjectivity.

In the face of technological changes in our recording media and communication systems, forms of cultural memory and intersubjectivity are emerging (though they are by no means caused by them, unless the crises of the symbolic order mentioned earlier are regarded as technological in origin[1]) for which chronological time-frames and geographical co-ordinates are inappropriate [13] But to the degree that the culture is generating and circulating new forms of media memory, the subject 'invents' or invokes temporal and spatial markers (for example, the shifters 'now' and 'me') for her/his own memory, body-based and somatic, which is to say, she/he fantasizes history in the form of trauma. Or, to put it slightly differently, the contemporary subject will have a necessarily traumatic (because lacunary, incomplete, narratively no longer sanctioned) relation to history and memory: in the first instance to her/his own history, but

13 See the old French phrase 'Up to 1919 it s history, from 1919 to 1945 it s geography, and since 1945 it s politics quoted by Pierre Vidal-Naquet in Lawrence D Kritzman (ed), *Auschwitz and After Race Culture and 'the Jewish Question in France* (New York Routledge, 1995) p 28

more generally, to all history Trauma may here be (merely) the name of a particular contemporary subject-effect, as individuals (or groups) try to re-inscribe themselves into the different kinds of media-memory, thus highlighting their deficit as agents in their own life history

It is partly because of these latter anxieties that trauma therapy and psychoanalytic trauma theory has captured the attention of literary scholars such as Caruth, or of film theorists and media scholars For what makes trauma different from more traditional issues of representation (for instance, of how 'accurate' or 'truthful' a film is in relation to the history or event it is purporting to depict) is the idea that trauma also suspends the categories of true and false, being in some sense performative This is important in that, first of all, it casts doubt on the telos of one aspect of trauma theory (that the goal is 'narrative integration' or assimilation of 'the facts'). More generally, it allows the discussion to move beyond the usual therapeutic categories, be they poetological (Aristotle's 'catharsis' and 'anagnorisis') or Freudian ('acting out' and 'working through') But if trauma belongs to the category of the performative (the symptom speaks its subject's body), it is nonetheless a special case one would have to invent the category of the 'negative performative', because trauma affects the texture of experience by the apparent absence of traces Also, if trauma involves an 'event that precludes registration',[14] even the category of witnessing (including its pop-cultural ones of 'confession' and 'outing') collapses in the face of its inaccessibility even to the subject, quite apart from its non-representability If trauma is experienced through its forgetting, its repeated forgetting, then, paradoxically, one of the signs of the presence of trauma is the absence of all signs of it. This can present an especially distressing and self-doubting task for the subject having to come to terms with it, but it is also a daunting (and, dare one say, irresistible) challenge for the interpretant and analyst, since trauma potentially suspends the normal categories of story-telling, making it necessary that we revise our traditional accounts of narrative and narration [15] Furthermore, trauma theory raises questions such as the separation of body and voice, of representation and its material supports

The traceless text, but not *hors-texte*

What makes this account of the 'negative performative' an alternative to the 'repression model' is not only that trauma would no longer be a (version of the) return of the repressed. It would give the traumatic event the status of a (suspended) origin in the production of a representation, a discourse or a text, bracketed or suspended because marked by the absence of traces. The consequence of such a theory

14 Dori Laub in Caruth (ed)
Trauma Explorations in Memory

15 Sensing this Caruth expands on Freud s definition by arguing that to suffer from trauma is to be possessed or inhabited by an event which can also be an image In which case crucial to both contexts are questions of agency and authority but also of embodiment and spatial orientation such as active and passive or inside and out Caruth *Unclaimed Experience* p 5

of trauma is that it is not the event itself nor its distortion but its structure that is of chief interest. Belated, possessing but non-possessed, somatic but without visible signs (now that Freud's 'conversion' disorders, such as hysteria, have become virtually extinct), marked by deferral, unpredictability and incomplete knowledge, it is at once 'real' and 'spectral', 'historical' and 'virtual'. Hence also the affinity between trauma and fetish ('nothing there'), which in turn implies a disjuncture between seeing and knowing As such, it turns on a crisis of perception – though one no longer explained solely within the Freudian-Lacanian model of disavowal (and *Screen* theory's gaze), because it would take in also Benjamin's reflections on perception and shock, with allegory as the preferred hermeneutics of the shock experience.

Trauma theory is thus also related to 'modernity', or rather, it replies to the fact that postmodernism has proved to be untheorizable It is as if trauma theory appears 'behind' post-modernity, charting its political blockages (both critically and negatively), implicitly acknowledging but no longer having to regret, for instance, the fact that the grand narratives have been exhausted, including the grand narrative of the Holocaust, which has been seen as both the last of the grand narratives[16] and the very epitome of the impossibility of grand narratives [17] A citation from Caruth seems to hint at this connection 'history occurs in the form of a symptom Trauma is the name for an impossible history, or the name for the impossibility of history as narrative, as an ordered sequence of events, of agents as subjects, as chronology, as cause and effect, as rationality or purposiveness of actions.'[18]

If this is so, then what I have called the historical leftovers of the twentieth century act themselves like trauma theory's screen memories, since they cover for another philosophical debate, of which trauma theory is both part, and from which it tries to extricate itself. I am referring to deconstruction and its relation to history and referentiality The question (especially acute perhaps since the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) has become how to place history discursively, but without 'falling' into any crudely nominalist and realist positions or merely analyzing it across narrative and rhetorical tropes Hence the emphasis on temporality and spatiality, but 'displaced' in relation to the event 'trauma' would then be the name for a referentiality that can no longer be placed (that need no longer be placed) in a particular time or place, but whose time-space-place-referentiality is nonetheless posited, in fact, doubled and displaced in relation to an 'event'. That this could be of interest to film theorists, meditating on the special-effects blockbuster or event-movie, and might be suggestive to television scholars trying to get a handle on the facts-fantasies-and-fictions surrounding a media event like the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, is both evident and needs to be argued in a much longer paper.

16 Jean Baudrillard Holocaust *Cahiers du cinéma* no 302 (July-August 1979)

17 Jean Fracois Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis MI Minnesota University Press 1988)

18 Caruth (ed), *Trauma Explorations in Memory* p 7

In short, the dangers are obvious: trauma theory is both necessary, and it could become too handy a catch-all for resolving the aporias or lacunaes of previous theoretical configurations in the field of film and television studies, whereas its more challenging task is to think through the deadlocks of deconstruction in relation to extra-textuality and interpretation, as well as rethinking the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis. Extending it in this direction, trauma theory would be called upon to rescue interpretation and hermeneutics from the relativism of 'there is no *hors-texte*', from the fundamentalism of the 'authentic experience' but also from the (cynical) tyranny of the 'performative', since trauma poses the enigma of interpretation as a negative performative, while referring to a historicity and a temporality that acknowledges (deconstruction's) deferral and (psychoanalysis's) double time of *Nachtraglichkeit* In which case, trauma theory is not so much a theory of recovered memory as it is one of recovered referentiality Such referentiality, however, can only be recovered through interpretation, because as Gertrude Stein might have said, there is no there there Yet if we can accept that 'postmodernism' may well have been cultural theory's mourning work for the second half of the twentieth century, then the hermeneutic historian will most certainly hope that 'where nothing is (and everything goes), there shall trauma be'.

Melodrama, cinema and trauma

E. ANN KAPLAN

1 In her introduction to *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London British Film Institute 1987) Christine Gledhill stresses Peter Brooks s list of forces acting on the bourgeoisie, including the refiguring of Good and Evil in human life demonstration of conflicting unconscious forces in the psyche and confrontation with the limits of language and the decentred subject exposed by modernism (p 31)

Originating in the 1970s and 1980s, theories of melodrama in Film Studies have tended to fall into two main groups· those (largely by male critics) focusing on the origins of the genre in the bourgeois family and class struggle, and those by feminists stressing the genre's address to white female viewers' sufferings and frustrations within the patriarchal codes of the middle-class family in the West More recently, theorists such as Christine Gledhill have sought to combine these theoretical approaches in a useful way [1] But approaching the genre from the perspective of trauma theory highlights gaps in theorizing about melodrama, and may throw light on the processes of theorizing itself

In short, the dangers are obvious: trauma theory is both necessary, and it could become too handy a catch-all for resolving the aporias or lacunaes of previous theoretical configurations in the field of film and television studies, whereas its more challenging task is to think through the deadlocks of deconstruction in relation to extra-textuality and interpretation, as well as rethinking the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis. Extending it in this direction, trauma theory would be called upon to rescue interpretation and hermeneutics from the relativism of 'there is no *hors-texte*', from the fundamentalism of the 'authentic experience' but also from the (cynical) tyranny of the 'performative', since trauma poses the enigma of interpretation as a negative performative, while referring to a historicity and a temporality that acknowledges (deconstruction's) deferral and (psychoanalysis's) double time of *Nachtraglichkeit* In which case, trauma theory is not so much a theory of recovered memory as it is one of recovered referentiality Such referentiality, however, can only be recovered through interpretation, because as Gertrude Stein might have said, there is no there there Yet if we can accept that 'postmodernism' may well have been cultural theory's mourning work for the second half of the twentieth century, then the hermeneutic historian will most certainly hope that 'where nothing is (and everything goes), there shall trauma be'.

Melodrama, cinema and trauma

E. ANN KAPLAN

Originating in the 1970s and 1980s, theories of melodrama in Film Studies have tended to fall into two main groups: those (largely by male critics) focusing on the origins of the genre in the bourgeois family and class struggle, and those by feminists stressing the genre's address to white female viewers' sufferings and frustrations within the patriarchal codes of the middle-class family in the West More recently, theorists such as Christine Gledhill have sought to combine these theoretical approaches in a useful way [1] But approaching the genre from the perspective of trauma theory highlights gaps in theorizing about melodrama, and may throw light on the processes of theorizing itself

Trauma, as a psychological category, emerged with the modern development of psychoanalysis in the West. The bourgeois family, which nineteenth-century melodrama was to reflect back to the Victorian middle classes in Europe and the USA, became the site for female hysteria, and industrialization provided the social conditions for the train and machine accidents and the large-scale wars which in turn prompted attention to the traumatic symptoms which these produced in men

A psychoanalytic theory that follows Freud's linking of trauma to fantasy as well as to a sudden overwhelming event, provides a way of connecting the unconscious and history. As a genre occupying the space between history and the unconscious, melodrama offers an imaginary focused on the private sphere of the family – where traumas are secret, hidden – yet an arena structured by male power in the public sphere. The family traumas (mainly concerning white women) imaged in melodrama, then, are closely linked to the politics and economics of the Euro-American nation-state, as I note below.

But first, in what senses can one speak of 'cultural' trauma? What analogies might be possible between forms of individual and of cultural trauma? Could we say that in a culture as in an individual, the impact of an overwhelming event cannot be absorbed and is split off? That it returns in fictions apparently unrelated to that event, yet insisting on its remembrance, insisting on keeping the event present? What evidence is there that an aesthetic genre like melodrama might bear traces of such cultural trauma? How far might arguments about the origins of melodrama serve to support such an argument?

I shall begin with the 1970s and 1980s melodrama theories noted above As a disruptive modernism linked both to industrialism and to imperialism got underway, theorists conjectured that stories and images were needed to create an imaginary stable society that replaced the old aristrocratic order and justified colonialism and slavery. It makes sense that personal and social traumas caused by political and social transition were displaced into fictional melodrama forms where they could be more safely approached or remembered but also forgotten, in the peculiar manner of trauma In this context, it is plausible to link melodrama, an aesthetic form (on the stage and in popular fiction) with the dissociated traumas of class and gender struggle.

Freud no doubt oversimplifies the relationship between texts and readers, when he notes in his essay, 'Thoughts on war and death', that 'in the realm of fiction we discover that plurality of lives for which we crave. We die in the person of the hero, yet we survive him, and are ready to die again for the next hero just as safely '[2] But could we say that Hollywood melodramas from the 1920s to at least the 1960s perform a similar task? Do they not endlessly repeat family and war traumas and recoveries, bringing audiences back time and again by ensuring closure and cure at the film's end?

2   Sigmund Freud Thoughts on war and death (1915) in Collected Papers Volume IV ed Joan Riviere (London Hogarth Press 1949) p 307

3 In his *Representing the Holocaust History Theory Trauma* (Ithaca NY Cornell University Press 1994) p 144 Dominick La Capra quotes Eric Santer in Saul Friedlander (ed) *Probing the Limits of Representation Nazism and the 'Final Solution* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press 1992) developing a point similar to mine By narrative fetishism I mean the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place (It) is the way an inability or refusal to mourn employs traumatic events it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere

4 Sigmund Freud *Moses and monotheism* (1939) *Pelican Freud Library*, Volume 13 (Harmondsworth Penguin 1985)

5 Miriam Hansen, Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer *Theory of Film the Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton NJ Princeton University Press 1998) p xi

6 Other theorists also argue for literary genres as repeated forms in which a society's past is remembered For Mikhail Bakhtin for instance genre memory meant the complex dialogue between the sedimented memories of history and nation preserved in genre forms and the alternative narratives of historical experience they bring into relief Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation Hollywood Looks at US History* (1997), p 7 Kaja Silverman s concept of historical trauma is especially important since like Freud she theorizes cultural trauma as against individual types By historical trauma Silverman means an historical ramification extending far beyond the individual psyche Kaja Silverman *Masculinity at the Margins* (New York and London Routledge 1992), p 55 Such historical trauma depends for its

There are not many models for the sort of argument I am trying to make.[3] One could turn to Freud's problematic 'Moses and monotheism',[4] where, towards the end of his life, Freud theorizes that the Jews' traumatic killing of Moses repeated the primal horde's murder of the powerful father leader For Freud, traces of the crime continue throughout history If one were to extend Freud's theory, one might argue that at certain historical moments aesthetic forms emerge to accommodate fears and fantasies related to suppressed historical events In repeating the traumas of both class and gender struggle, melodrama would, in its very generic formation. constitute a traumatic cultural symptom. As the melodramatic form was taken up by cinema, it arguably continued to repeat, while concealing cultural traumas too painful to confront directly. By the twentieth century, as Miriam Hansen has argued, the cinema 'attracted and made visible to itself and society an emerging, heterogeneous mass public' and 'engaged the contradiction of modernity at the level of the senses, the level at which the impact of modern technology on human experience was most palpable and irreversible [5] Theoretically, this seems reasonable, but empirically, such a position is hard to support with convincing evidence – much as Freud's thesis is not supported by historians

Yet without such hypothetical reasoning, how is one to account for melodrama's fascination and popular appeal, and for its repetition of stories of high-born characters brought down by frailties, betrayals and familial traumas,[6] of the oppression of women, perhaps most dramatically imaged in the many tellings and retellings of Mrs Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), and similar stories, or by the image of Ingrid Bergman in *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944); or of the relegation of minorities to degrading roles? The repetition of certain stories may betray a traumatic cultural symptom, while the mode's adherence to realism, and thus to closure, seals over the traumatic ruptures and breaks that the culture endured The style reassures the viewer, who leaves the cinema believing she is safe and that all is well in her world

But what about links between family trauma in the West and the politics and economics of the nation-state? New research, such as that by Margaret Backus or Ian Baucom,[7] has convincingly argued for the impact of Europe's colonialism in Ireland and England on family relations (especially in regard to male violence towards women) Earlier work by writers such as Aimée Cesaire and Frantz Fanon[8] has detailed the traumatic impact of melodrama's images – produced. as noted, by the unconscious of colonizing nations – on colonized peoples Perhaps 1970s and 1980s theories of melodrama, which studied female trauma but omitted to look at racial trauma, evidence a traumatic 'forgetting', an absence only explicable by cultural amnaesia

And what about other cinematic genres? What can they tell us

impact on what Silverman (following Jacques Rancière, as Burgoyne points out) calls the dominant fiction, namely the mechanism' by which society tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure of the fixation of meaning of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences (p 54) Historical trauma is what interrupt(s) or even deconstitute(s) what a society assumes to be its master narratives and immanent Necessity' (p 55)

7 Margot Backus *The Gothic Family Romance Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Durham NC and London Duke University Press 1999) Ian Baucom *Out of Place Englishness and the Location of Identity* (Princeton NJ Princeton University Press 1999)

8 Aimee Cesaire *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York Monthly Review Press 1972) Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York Grove Press 1967)

9 But which trauma? Whose trauma? Many are currently debating the American Psychiatric Society s definitions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in its diagnostic manuals especially the third and fourth editions that first included the disorder Issues hinge on what kinds of experience are said to lead to genuine PTSD – experiences said to be 'outside the normal range of human experience – and whether there is gender and racial bias in the definition But these issues lie beyond my remit here

about trauma and its links to cinema? Independent cinema, not bound, in Kaja Silverman's words, by the 'dominant fiction', is freer to address trauma's modalities in its aesthetic forms.[9] Rather than focusing on traumatic cultural symptoms, independent cinematic techniques show paralysis, repetition, circularity – all aspects of the non-representability of trauma and yet of the search to figure its pain Trauma is narration without narrativity – that is, without the ordered sequence we associate with narratives. Images are repeated but without meaning; they do not have a clear beginning, middle and end. Rather they erupt into cinematic space, unheralded in the story as in an individual's consciousness The struggle to figure trauma's effects cinematically leads to means other than linearity or story fragments, hallucinations, flashbacks are the modes trauma cinema characteristically adopts.

These modes in turn produce a far different impact on the viewer than do those of melodrama One may distinguish four main positions for viewers of trauma films, according to film types and aesthetics

- In melodrama, the spectator is introduced to trauma through a film's themes and techniques, but the film ends with a comforting closure or 'cure'. Such mainstream works posit trauma (against its reality) as a discrete past event, locatable, representable and curable (for example, Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* [1945] or *Marnie* [1964], Irving Rapper's *Now Voyager* [1942])
- The spectator is vicariously traumatized (for example, horror films like David Cronenberg's *The Brood* [1979]or *The Fly* [1986]; or films about colonial torture or the concentration camps) – a potentially negative result in the sense that the viewer may recoil in distaste or terror out of fear of being haunted by unheralded painful images (as in trauma itself) rather than being empathetically or ethically moved
- The spectator is positioned as a voyeur (routine television news images of catastrophes such as airplane crashes, deaths of famous people, ethnic wars and starving people globally, or series like *Holocaust*)
- The spectator is addressed as a 'witness', arguably the most politically useful position (for example, Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* [1955], Marguerite Duras's/Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* [1959] Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* [1946], Rea Tajira's *History/Memory* [1991] or Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries* [1989])

Trauma can be approached (if not known) only through its figuration by either its victim, by those witnessing it, or by artists undertaking its telling. Forms such as cinema may be especially appropriate to figuring the visual, aural and non-linear fragmented

phenomena of trauma – to performing it. Trauma analysis aims to distinguish and understand trauma landscapes – their politics, aesthetics and impacts.[10] Since memory, fantasy, history and cinema cannot escape the effects of cultural and individual trauma, cinema scholars must develop analytic forms appropriate to illuminating trauma's impacts

The trauma of history: flashbacks upon flashbacks

MAUREEN TURIM

Film Studies in many ways prefigured the current interest in trauma studies, but did so under the aegis of psychoanalytic approaches to film, particularly those that had a historical and structural dimension The fact that trauma studies has tended to focus on testimony and literature may be part of the reason that previous film analysis and theory has not been considered central to this debate More significantly, trauma studies has sometimes tried to distance itself from psychoanalytic methodology while borrowing some key terms and concepts, a move generated by a belief that psychoanalysis can not view historical trauma, either because history is not its concern, or because Freud's modification of the seduction theory complicated access to a historical cause for trauma[1] Let me propose here a return to other aspects of psychoanalytic writing on trauma that become useful to a rediscovery of film theory's contribution to our understanding of the representation of trauma

Trauma is a concept omnipresent in Freud's writings, it is reconfigured as the *tuché* in Lacan, that instance or insistence of a contact in (or with) the real that lies behind both imaginary and symbolic formations. Returning to Freud's notions of trauma, we find everything from the birth trauma to the war trauma, life potentially may be marked by traumatic blows to the psyche (for let us not forget that the metaphor of psychic trauma relies on a comparison to the more visible damage done a physical body by a blow, shock or cut) Freud was well aware of the historicity of trauma Consider his 'Introduction to psycho-analysis and the war neuroses' (1919) where

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2 Sigmund Freud Introduction to psycho-analysis and the war neuroses' (1919), in James Strachey (ed) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Volume XVI (London Hogarth Press 1953) p 210

he not only establishes the specificity of historical conditions that cause a war neurosis, but makes the connection between the aetiology of the war neurosis and traumatic neurosis in general 'In traumatic and war neuroses the human ego is defending itself from a danger which threatens it from without or which is embodied in a shape assumed by the ego itself.'[2] It is clear what Freud means by a danger which threatens from without, but it may be far less clear what he means by the last phrase, 'which is embodied in a shape assumed by the ego itself ' Here he is talking of a splitting of the self, in which the subject's former peacetime self is in conflict with his own 'warlike' self, a self generated or released in reaction to the external threats. The events of history not only create pressures on the subject from the outside, but cause internal shifts and schisms In this essay Freud is concerned with what we now call battlefield shock

Earlier Freud looked at the particular effects World War I had even on non-combatants He recognized that this war might be considered a more pervasive traumatic instance to the twentieth-century public at large:

3 Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the time on war and death the disillusionment of the war (1915), in Strachey (ed) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Volume XIV p 280

> Two things in this war have aroused our sense of disillusionment the low morality shown externally by states which in their internal relations pose as the guardians of moral standards, and the brutality shown by individuals whom, as participants in the highest human civilization, one would not have thought capable of such behaviour.[3]

Placing these two speculations on that war together, we can see that Freud understood war trauma as a series of events that occur in a particular context of disillusionment and dislocation If these insights help us understand traumatic neurosis in general, so does Freud's notion that trauma invites repression Neurotic symptoms follow. Various symptoms might appear gradually. Memories are brought back by association with events in the present

One extrapolation I wish to make is that trauma is not necessarily a single event, but a series of events that affects the imaginary and the symbolic. If we consider Freud's particularly suggestive phrase, 'Loss of love plays much the same part in hysteria as the threat of castration does in phobias and fear of the superego in obsessional neurosis,' one can see that the accretion of a series of traumatic events could affect the self in numerous ways [4] We can summarize Freud's treatment of the traumatic event as considering circumstances as various as death of a love object, betrayal, rape, and dismemberment, in other words all configurations of loss that remind us profoundly of the lack in being in Lacanian terms, or, to put it in Freudian terms, all deep wounds to the psyche (the self or ego)

4 Sigmund Freud, 'Inhibitions symptoms and anxiety (1926) in Strachey (ed) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Volume XX p 143

Obviously Freudian consideration of World War I provides us tools with which to consider WWII and particularly the Holocaust.

Let's reconsider the Holocaust as a trauma whose event structure is multifaceted. Not one tragic event, the Holocaust unfolds as a nexus of events, whose personal and historical dimensions help us understand the interweaving of the pain of multiple losses one's family, one's home, one's sense of being in the world, one's dignity, one's faith in all senses of that word

I have looked at representation of such trauma previously (and all too briefly) in the 'Holocaust flashbacks· trauma and repression' section of my book *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*.[5] I highlighted the frequency of the flashback trope as a way of signaling and exploring the return of traumas connected to the Holocaust both to survivors within the narrative and by extension for the viewing audience I suggested that these flashbacks were often abrupt, fragmentary, and repetitive, marked by a modernism of technique. The form of these modernist Holocaust flashbacks becomes a trope in itself. It signals disruption of everyday postwar existence Violently inserted flashbacks inscribe in narratives a shattering of complacency Postwar tranquility that might put aside or bury a past that had not been worked through will be slashed not only by a call to remember, but also concomitantly by a call to make the connections between the past and atrocities in the present. Though similar abrupt flashbacks mark 1920s avant-garde films, only in the post World War II period are they associated with the events of history and only then do they appear in films of mass distribution

Let me return to a film I discussed there, Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1965) in order to demonstrate the enmeshing of the personal and historical in representation of psychic trauma How does working through past traumas set up the possibility of recognition of traumatic implications of the present? This film explicitly links memory of the Holocaust to the comprehension of one's position in the traumatic space of 1960s US capitalism as experienced by those who dwell in urban ghettos

Important as a US independent production that coincided with a European modernist style, the film nonetheless embarrasses in its period stereotypes of suburban Jews as well as ghetto Blacks and Hispanics Certainly such stereotypes and much heavy-handed symbolism are characteristic of the US 'social comment' film in general, and 1960s films' examination of race and ethnicity in particular A recent essay by Leonard Leff[6] provides great insight into the film's conditions of production and the context of its representation He argues that the camerawork of Boris Kaufman provides the dimension to the flashback sequences, and notes the shift of the flashbacks' setting from Poland to Germany, as well as providing information on Lumet's struggle with fixing the duration of these sequences Leff's essay spurs my return to the film to reexamine the structuration of historical trauma, not as an aesthetic

embrace of all aspects of the film, but rather as renewed conviction
in its significance as historical artefact

Rod Steiger as the anti-hero Sol Nazerman, a suburbanite who
runs a pawnshop in East Harlem and is haunted by images of his
concentration camp past, helps us through the strength of his
performance refocus on what the film does well. The film does some
remarkable work on the memory of trauma, work that it borrows
from a series of dreams inscribed in Wallant's source novel, but
considerably transforms through image inscription

Nazerman, seated on the balcony of a high-rise apartment building
recounts in virtual monologue to a social worker who has tried to
befriend him his troubled thoughts on this day, the twenty-fifth
anniversary of his family's arrest by the Nazis

> There have been memories that I have ... that I thought that I had
> pushed them far away from me and they keep rushing in and
> words   words that I thought that I had kept myself from
> hearing and now they flood my mind.

Steiger metes out the words, in rhythms that ebb and flow evoking
the will to speak and the forces that have caused him to refrain from
any direct discussion of this *Yahrzeit*, this anniversary of death and
loss

> Today is an anniversary. I didn't die. Everything that I loved was
> taken away from me and I didn't die There was nothing I could
> do. Nothing. Strange, I could do nothing. No, there was nothing I
> could do.

These halting lines describing the traumatic memories are as close as
Nazerman can get to narrating the traumatic events of his life to any
others who occupy his world. We hear this hesitant articulation as a
psychiatrist might His unresolved pain is framed against bleak
cityscape the wire railing of the balcony, the numerous railway lines
below, the highway all but obliterating the view of the river in the
distance.

This monologue stands, then, as central marker of the memory
images which intersperse the narrative, cut in as graphically evoked
by the urban environment of East Harlem and events in the present

- The picnic of the Nazerman family on the day that we will later
  learn is the day of their arrest. This scene opens the film with
  an image of innocent pleasure and is uniquely connected to
  Nazerman at his sister's suburban house. It recurs at several
  points in fragmented flashes connected to other memories Only
  at the very end is the traumatic conclusion of the arrest
  presented as an event about to occur.
- An incident from the camp in which an escaped prisoner.
  Nazerman's friend, has been tracked down by the German

guards and their dogs, is tortured and killed in front of the other
prisoners The memory is presented as flashback fragments, first
as brief flash images that are associative edits from the date on
the calendar that marks the anniversary of Nazerman's wife's
death, and then from youths fighting on a Harlem playground
- Nazerman's wife forced to service Nazi soldiers, a memory
evoked by a black prostitute offering her services to him at his
pawnshop
- Nazerman's family being deported with other Jews in a crowded
transport railway car, evoked by a crowded NY subway car
Exhausted, he is unable to keep his son on his shoulders, letting
him slip to the floor In the present he exits the subway utterly
distressed.

These various associative montage series set up a metaphoric parallel
between the concentration camp and urban poverty Those who write
about the film tend to debate the value of this parallel. I am less
concerned here with any assumption of equivalence implied by the
comparison, it is less an issue of weighing major disasters of history
against the crushing poverty and suffering of everyday life than one
of becoming aware of both in their specificity and difference. The
film relies on the trope of associative memory to enable the trauma
of the past to be shown The present calls the past to our attention I
am equally interested in how the film indicates how misrecognized or
foreclosed traumas of the present might be obscured by our not
having worked through the traumas of the past Trauma effects here
loss of empathy, as the self closes down If the traumas of the
present are those affecting others, one might have to understand
these traumas empathetically, something the traumatized self cannot
necessarily do

I continue to point to this film's Holocaust flashbacks as evoking a
representation of trauma, as one of the more piercing depictions of
memory flashes to be found anywhere in film The staccato cross-
cutting of past and present builds a visual power through images that
graphically match yet both compare and contrast symbolically The
Holocaust survivor is portrayed as a man haunted by images that
slice into his daily existence against his will and outside of his
control

In the current debate over trauma and testimony that we have been
asked to discuss in this dossier, I find that the combination of the
halting verbal articulations and the variety of fragmented images of
painful memories suggest something of the poesis of trauma Trauma
invades, troubles and even forecloses by asserting the unresolved
pain of events that cumulatively have overwhelmed a subject's ability
to cope That these images here are of the murder of a friend,
repeated rapes of a beloved wife, and the inability to protect one's
children from death suggest that the monumental traumas of history

cause such personal wounds, repeatedly, one on top of another, each conjoining with some larger historically-based symbolism of one's helplessness, one's guilt, one's disenfranchisement.

The repetitions built into Nazerman's enunciations ('I didn't die' is said twice, 'Nothing I could do' is said four times in variants) suggests the haunting return inherent in the traumatic, already multiple and repetitious in its first occurrence, trauma forces its reexperience as invasive memory or displaced symptom Yet the 1960s modernist version of psychological drama retains a focus on individual, personal manifestations of trauma. *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), with its script by Marguerite Duras, is among the traumatic flashback films which force one through various textual strategies to think through the national and international implications of individually remembered war traumas.[7] Still, even those films which focus primarily on individual trauma may be read in a larger social and historical context Psychological drama, steeped as it is at this time in metaphorical representation, does call upon empathy to address what can be shared experience Does it not hold out as a goal of its metaphorical strategy a comprehension of the historicity of trauma as a collective phenomenon?

That is perhaps why the concept of literature as witnessing and testimony have become key elements in the study of trauma in recent work[8] In some cases, the form of a work such as *Finnegan's Wake* (James Joyce, 1939) make the argument for literature's testimony quite different than it might be for more direct forms of testimony[9] Yet such a project of reading struggles to renew the historical dimensions of our analyses, while it insists that the form a testimony takes becomes a key to our sense of what trauma means So in addition to my earlier emphasis on trauma as often a series of events whose context becomes key to the severity of their wounding, let me suggest that individual and collective elements of trauma are often interwoven and inextricable. When one is a member of a traumatized collectivity, what has happened to others like one's self has the potential to multiply the wounds Ironically one of the effects of trauma is to distance the self not only from one's memory, but also from the experience of others, and from any collective formation. In many ways then the works that attempt to represent trauma become a call for attention, for an end to isolation, and for a meaningful return of historical memory.

7   The consequences of form in *Hiroshima mon amour* is something I discuss in *Flashbacks in Film Memory and History* pp 210–18 See also Cathy Caruth *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore MD Johns Hopkins University Press 1996), pp 25–56

8   See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York Routledge 1992), Suzette A Henke *Shattered Subjects Trauma and Testimony in Women s Life-Writing* (New York St Martin's Press, 1998)

9   Christine van Boheemen-Saaf, *Joyce, Derrida Lacan and the Trauma of History Reading, Narrative and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge MA Cambridge University Press 1999)

Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience

JANET WALKER

1 J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis
The Language of Psycho-Analysis,
trans Donald Nicholson-Smith
(New York W W Norton 1967),
p 465

*Trauma (Psychical) An event in the subject's life defined by its
intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and
by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the
psychical organization.*[1]

The end of the twentieth century saw a series of media episodes that
publicized the inadequacy of empirically-based history writing about
catastrophic events. In the controversy over a planned exhibition at
Washington DC's Air and Space Museum featuring the Enola Gay
aeroplane, all sides acknowledged that the USA had bombed
Hiroshima and Nagasaki But attributions of public historical
meaning varied greatly: the bombings brought an end to the war,
thus saving American lives, or, the bombings were a capricious
atrocity perpetrated by the US government against Japanese civilians
In other cases of contested memory, especially those contingent upon
personal recollection, the very facts themselves have eluded
discovery and verification. Is Binjamin Wilkomirski's book,

2 Binjamin Wilkomirski Fragments
Memories of a Wartime
Childhood trans Carol Brown
Janeway (New York Schocken
Books 1995)

Fragments Memories of a Wartime Childhood,[2] an autobiography
about a Jewish boy's early childhood experiences in the Riga ghetto
and several death camps, or is it a confabulation cut to the measure
of Holocaust deniers Wilkomirski lies, Jews lie, and the Holocaust is
a hoax?

Perhaps the most furious and prolific of all the retrospective
debates has been the one concerning the legitimacy of repressed and
recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse, often of an
incestuous character As popular media and juridical discourses
would have it, either incest exists in epidemic proportions, or 'false
memory' is the epidemic form. women's childhood memories are
mendacious, iatrogenic (created by the therapeutic process itself), part

3 According to the professional
journal of family therapy
Networker By the end of 1994
more than 300 articles on "false
memory" had appeared in
magazines and newspapers Katy
Butler Marshaling the media'
Networker (March/April 1995)
p 37

of a feminist plot, or just dead wrong.[3] In any case, the topic has
created an appetite for hard data made all the more voracious – and
all the more ideological – by the inherent frustrations of historical
research in the personal realm But of greater significance, I contend,
is the debate's unfortunate epistemological bifurcation: recovered
memories of childhood sexual abuse are either fully true or they are
fully false, sexual abuse happened or it did not.

While the above cases assuredly differ in their specifications and

4 The False Memory Syndrome
Foundation, which had in the mid
1990s 4 000 members forty-eight
chapters and an annual budget of
$700 000, was established to
support parents (mainly fathers)
accused by their children (mainly
daughters) of perpetrating sexual
assault against them and to
publicize false memory
syndrome as an explanation for
these children s beliefs Its board
includes memory researcher
Elizabeth Loftus, co author with
Katherine Ketcham of *The Myth
of Repressed Memory False
Memories and Allegations of
Sexual Abuse* (New York St
Martin's Press 1994)

5 Elizabeth Waites *Trauma and
Survival Post-Traumatic and
Dissociative Disorders in Women*
(New York W W Norton, 1993)
p 28 Waites cites Lenore Terr
*Too Scared To Cry Psychic
Trauma in Childhood* (New York
HarperCollins, 1990) and C M
Fair *Memory and Central
Nervous Organization* (New York
Paragon House 1988)

6 Lenore Terr, 'True memories of
childhood trauma flaws
absences, and returns', in Kathy
Pezdek and William P Banks
(eds) *The Recovered
Memory/False Memory Debate*
(San Diego CA Academic Press
1996)

7 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual
of Mental Disorders* fourth
edition (DSM-IV) (Washington,
DC American Psychiatric
Association 1994) p 428

8 Janet Walker The traumatic
paradox documentary films,
historical fictions, and
cataclysmic past events *Signs*
vol 22 no 4 (1997)

9 'In the absence of independent
corroboration' writes John
Kihlstrom no criter[a] appear to
distinguish reliably [among]
accurate recollections and
fabrications and confabulations
John F Kihlstrom, Exhumed
memory' in Steven Jay Lynn and
Kevin M McConkey (eds), *Truth
in Memory* (New York The
Guilford Press 1998) p 18

sociopolitical import, they meet at the intersection of catastrophe, memory and representation. There they throw up roadblocks in the form of questions about the reliability of memory, the intractability of trauma, and the abjection of historiography. While these roadblocks will never be dissolved, they can be radically reconstructed. I contend, through the insights of contemporary psychological literature on trauma and memory and those of recent autobiographical documentary filmmaking Both practices, the one clinical and theoretical and the other filmographic and videographic, are engaged in articulating the complexities of the relationships among personal memory, historical representation, and meaning

Exemplary psychological studies, particularly but not exclusively those by feminist psychiatrists and psychologists, have shown that traumatic memory is distinguished from other evidentiary forms precisely because it eludes binaristic 'it happened or it didn't' approaches Feminist researchers have been at the forefront of such study because, while they seek to redress the crime of childhood sexual abuse through social and legal activism and appropriate therapeutic procedures, they must also confront the possibility that some memory claims or aspects of memory claims may indeed be mistaken This is not to concede the battle to anti-feminist groups, such as the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, which contend that all recovered memories are false memories,[4] but rather to acknowledge the great vicissitudes of memory.

'Memory for traumatic events can be extremely veridical', asserts Elizabeth Waites.[5] In fact, memories for traumatic events are known for being *more* veridical than memories for everyday events when it comes to the 'gist' of the memory.[6] But it is also true that real catastrophes can disturb memory processing Whereas popular and juridical venues tend to reject reports of traumatic experiences that contain mistakes or amnaesiac elements, contemporary theories of trauma show that such memory features, along with 'distressing recollections', and 'recurring . hallucinations and dissociative flashback episodes', are a common result of the traumatic experience itself.[7] This is what I have termed the 'traumatic paradox'[8] Far from belying the truth of an event, a fantasy (used here to mean an imagined scene that is the distorted representation of a wish) may be inextricably, but obliquely, connected to and produced by real events of the past

A major difficulty is that 'in the absence of independent corroboration', true and false memories may be virtually indistinguishable from one another.[3] But this does not give us leave to evacuate the realities of incest or gritty hardship from a space of memory mapped as an internal topography In developing the concept of fantasy, Freud refused to eliminate from its purview the domain of material reality. But he retained several different notions of the relationship between fantasy and reality fantasy, he

hypothesized, is *both* 'a distorted derivative of the memory of actual fortuitous events' (such as imperfectly remembered scenes from infancy), *and 'an imaginary expression* designed to conceal the reality of the *instinctual dynamic*' (emphasis mine) [10] Likewise, Freud's notion of the memory-trace is more complicated than the popular view of memory as a simple mechanical impression of the reality to which it corresponds For one thing, Freud conceived of the memory-trace as 'particular arrangements of facilitations,'[11] or established pathways, in a 'neurological model of the functioning of the psychical apparatus' [12] Whether or not they are attributed to Freud, such ideas are productively appplied in contemporary theories of traumatic memory where it is conceived of as an interpretive, reconstructive phenomenon that relies nevertheless on real life referents My main point is that while there is no question that traumatic memories based on actual external events are, in the final analysis, internal representations, they are not therefore identical to internal representations that present themselves as memories but are reflective of things that never really happened It is useful, therefore, to follow the lead of some contemporary researchers in thinking of memory not as a problem of storage and retrieval of a discrete quantity of information but rather as a question of correspondence – and loss of correspondence – between recollections and actual past events [13]

The value of traumatic memory research for the rhetoric of history may be regarded as being enhanced by the knowledge that '[M]emory errors are not bothersome anomalies to be explained away or minimized, but rather they reflect the normal processes by which we interpret the world around us '[14] That a fallible memory may speak to a historical truth is made clear through psychiatrist Dori Laub's description of an experience with oral testimony and the Holocaust [15] A woman in her late sixties testified to researchers from the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies that she had seen four chimneys explode as a result of actions during the Auschwitz uprising But in reality only one chimney and not all four had been destroyed Thus, as Laub explains, the historians discredited the woman's account '[s]ince the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept – nor give credence to – her whole account of the events' [16] But Laub disagreed The register of reality being testified to is not just empirical but abstract It is precisely the quality of exaggeration that enables us to read the event as momentous, thus giving the memory its historical resonance Contemporary clinicians and theorists of traumatic memory are compelled, therefore, by the truths that inform fantasy constructions and, conversely, by the fantasies that inhere in veridical constructions

Films do not 'theorize' about memory processes, but alongside psychological writing on trauma and memory and alongside the

10 Laplanche and Pontalis, on Phantasy (or Fantasy) *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* p 315

11 Laplanche and Pontalis on Memory-Trace in ibid, p 248

12 Laplanche and Pontalis on Facilitation, in ibid p 157

13 David G Payne and Jason M Blackwell 'Truth in memory caveat emptor in Lynn and McConkey (eds) *Truth in Memory*

14 Ibid p 53

15 Dori Laub Bearing witness, or the vicissitudes of listening in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub *Testimony Crises of Witnessing in Literature Psychoanalysis and History* (New York Routledge 1992) p 59 I have also referred to this example in Walker, The traumatic paradox

16 Laub 'Bearing witness pp 59–63

17 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York Basic Books 1992) p 38

mass-mediated public debates on the history and meaning of various catastrophes, the 1980s and 1990s have seen the development of a 'trauma cinema'. By that I mean a group of films, each of which deals with a world-shattering event or events of the past, whether public, personal, or both. The stylistic and narrative modality of trauma cinema is nonrealist Like traumatic memories that feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over 'verbal narrative and context,'[17] these films are characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles And they approach the past through an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonmyic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks.

The catalogue of film topics encompassed by trauma cinema finds its best description – not coincidentally – in the entry for 'post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)' in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* PTSD may be caused by experiencing *or witnessing* 'military combat, violent personal assault (sexual assault, physical attack, robbery, mugging), being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or manmade disasters, severe automobile accidents, or being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness'[18] Hayden White has also made a similar list that samples what he calls the 'holocaustal' event: 'the two World Wars, the Great Depression, a growth in world population hitherto unimaginable, poverty and hunger on a scale never before experienced, pollution of the ecosphere by nuclear explosions . programs of genocide undertaken by societies utilizing scientific technology and rationalized procedures of government'.[19]

18 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, p 424
19 Hayden White The modernist event , in Vivian Sobchack (ed), *The Persistence of History* (New York Routledge, 1996) p 20

Of course the situations of children being abused in their homes, children and parents being wrested from their homes and confined to camps, and whole Jewish populations being the intended target of the Nazi's Final Solution are different in important ways Yet we have much to gain from psychology's joint consideration of, say, the fallout from incest and combat trauma The emerging literature of the 1980s on sexual traumatization benefited from the existing literature on battlefield trauma And I expect that the public attacks on women's recovered memories, however unpleasant, will result in the discovery that created elements are as much a feature of combat trauma as they are of recovered memory.[20]

20 In this regard see Fred H Frankel s groundbreaking The concept of flashbacks in historical perspective *The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* vol XLII no 4 (1994) From a survey of the literature, Frankel concludes that war trauma flashbacks and child sexual abuse flashbacks are generally written about as if they were veridical memories (Frankel's article was written in 1993 before the public outcry against women's recovered memories as false memories) But interestingly his close analysis of such studies shows that they themselves contain evidence that fantasy elements are a feature of supposedly true memories
21 Ibid , pp 22–3
22 Ibid p 23

Twentieth-century catastrophes are extraordinary, argues White, because they must be comprehended through a 'revolution in representational practices . and the technologies of representation made possible by the electronics revolution'.[21] 'Modern electronic media "explode" events before the eyes of viewers.'[22] Television's endless repetition of footage documenting the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle failed to deepen our genuine comprehension of the tragedy, no matter how many times it was replayed. It is not

23 Hayden White 'Historical
emplotment and the problem of
truth in Saul Friedlander (ed)
Probing the Limits of
Representation Nazism and the
Final Solution (Cambridge MA
Harvard University Press 1992)
pp 51–2

24 Linda Williams in 'Mirrors
without memories – truth,
history, and the new
documentary', Film Quarterly vol
46 no 3 (1993) p 12 identified
a group of new or postmodern
documentaries that she wrote
about in terms of their ability to
approach the trauma of an
inaccessible past

25 Friedlander Probing the Limits of
Representation
26 As Laura Marcus has written
Autobiography was a central
case for feminist criticism in the
1980s exposing processes of
exclusion and marginalisation in
the construction of literary
canons Auto/biographical
Discourses Theory Criticism
Practice (Manchester and New
York Manchester University
Press 1995), p 1 From the
position of women's otherness,
the theory and practice of
women s autobiographical writing
emphasizes the constructedness
of the unified self upon which
traditional male autobiographical
writing is based

that the events of which White speaks are unreal or completely unrepresentable. Rather, because of their expansive scope, violent nature, and mass-mediated reproducibility, such events are unrepresentable *in the realist mode* [23] To think in terms of a 'trauma cinema', therefore, is to think of certain Vietnam or World War II-themed films including Francis Ford Coppola's pioneering *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) or the opening of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), in which fragmented editing and the use of extreme camera angles create in viewers a sense of disorientation and moral ambiguity designed to echo the experience of combat trauma One thinks of *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991), which White explicitly mentions, and *Thunderheart* (Michael Apted, 1992), in which catastrophic past events (the Kennedy assassination and the Wounded Knee Massacre respectively) intrude on linear narrative and disturb realist representation. One might also reflect on documentary films, including Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1987) and *Mr Death* (1999), that are explicitly about how the past is difficult, but perhaps not impossible, to know,[24] and that use re-enactment and extreme stylization to press this epistemological concern Moreover, 'trauma cinema' is an international and transnational phenomenon. Numerous entries exist, ranging from the striking early example of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), a French-Japanese co-production combining documentary and fictional elements in an emotional meditation on memory for acts of war, to Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* (1994), an English-French-Macedonian co-production that is a historical fiction, told achronologically, about a photojournalist who witnesses wartime violence in Bosnia and Macedonia. These films are linked as troubled retrospections on matters of cataclysmic history

It is my contention, however, that contemporary women's experimental autobiographical documentary practice represents the vanguard of the trauma cinema form For 'probing the limits'[25] of the filmic – and videographic – representation of traumatic past events of a personal and public nature has been for at least two decades a fully elaborated project of feminist and antiracist autobiographical documentary theory and practice, the latter based in turn on feminist and antiracist studies of the written autobiographical form.[26] Michelle Citron's *Daugter Rite* (1980), Lynn Hershman's *Confessions of a Camelion* (1985) and *First Person Plural* (1990), Lise Yasui's *Family Gathering* (1988), Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991), and *Tak for Alt* (1999) by Laura Bialis, Broderick Fox and Sarah Levy are exemplary works – dealing with incest, Japanese internment and the Holocaust respectively – that represent a growing list of women's (auto)biographical documentaries seeking appropriate expression for catastrophic events in the possibilities of non-classical, basically nonfiction cinematic language Such works breach the

standards of journalistic documentary filmmaking by incorporating fictive and personal elements into public historical topics. And in that breach they discover new truths about the correlation between the objective mode of documentary production and mainstream history, and about the potential of experimental documentary for historical understanding

History and Memory, for example, explores Japanese and Japanese-American internment in the USA during World War II by combining official documents, unofficial documents (the relics, musings and photographs of her own family members), *and* invented elements (a repeated sequence in which Tajiri plays her own mother performing an abstracted gesture it's not clear she ever really performed). The resulting piece is counternarrative, counterhistorical, and – as a traumatized representation – all the more 'true' for its re-enstatement of fiction and forgetting to the historical record.

If Michael Frisch is correct, and I think he is, the issue of historical understanding in contemporary society 'has come to seem a threat, even *the* threat to the authority of traditional political culture'.[27] I contend that the prevalent and heated debates over the legitimacy of repressed and recovered memory are a facet of this To the extent that they are remembered and believed, women's accusations of childhood incest and abuse have the ability to tackle male dominance and the subordination of women and children And to the extent that they are remembered and believed, the memories of US internment survivors can help secure our toehold against the 'ethnic cleansing' model of fascism. But, since one response to trauma is misremembering, the grievances of the traumatized cannot be redressed, nor can we write or film significant histories, as long as fantasy constructions in memory are held to mean the absence of truth. This is the very formulation that trauma theories and trauma cinema are structured to combat.[28]

27 Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York State University of New York Press 1990), p xxii

28 An earlier version of this paragraph appeared as my conclusion to The traumatic paradox

The *Boys Don't Cry* debate:

Girls still cry

PATRICIA WHITE

What is this love we have for the invert, boy or girl? It was they who were spoken of in every romance that we ever read . For in the girl it is the prince, and in the boy it is the girl that makes a prince a prince, and not a man

Djuna Barnes[1]

1   Djuna Barnes *Nightwood* (New York New Directions 1937) pp 136–7

An insistent link between the invert or transgendered figure and the romance genre is forged in *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberley Peirce, 1999), the independent narrative film based on the events leading to twenty-one-year-old Brandon Teena's rape and subsequent murder on New Year's Eve, 1993 Besides an eerie lighting and sound scheme that seem to envelop the film's desolate Falls City, Nebraska setting in an electrical haze – a motif highlighted now and again with speeded-up shots of traffic and power lines – Peirce's film does not answer to Djuna Barnes's lesbian modernist legacy on the level of baroque style On the level of narrative, the film is also functional In true-crime or biopic fashion, *Boys* sweeps inevitably – even, cruelly, satisfyingly – to its foregone conclusion, preserving tragic unity and eliciting pathos But the film's transgendered hero (played by Hilary Swank) seems to be Barnes's 'prince' incarnate, and the anguished female desire that *Boys* encompasses within an authorial/spectatorial 'we' would not be out of place in Barnes's fiction

If I say female desire, it is not because I am disavowing

Brandon's transgendered identity. It is because for me the centring subjectivity of the film belongs to Brandon's lover, Lana Tisdel (Chloë Sevigny) Brandon is present in most of the film's scenes (with important exceptions); Lana is not, and there are many events that she does not observe But whether Brandon is fucking up, desiring or desirable, he is seen from a perspective that could be Lana's. We do not experience his passing as a man as a deception, and I do not think this is only because we witness his gleeful self-fashioning in the film's first scene (complete with haircut and crotch stuffing). For when Lana 'finds out' much later, she does not feel betrayed. The film enunciates a 'we' who share 'this love   for the invert', extending from teenage girl to audience through numerous narrational cues For example, the optical point of view that opens the film – Brandon's gaze caught in his rear view mirror as he speeds away from a cop – is answered in the film's last shot by Lana's gaze ahead as she finally drives away from Falls City The narrative throughline provided by Lana and Brandon's romance has angered some commentators looking for a more documentary fidelity to the circumstances and context of Brandon's life and death But the strategy makes Lana's desire and way of seeing count. Brandon's wish for an 'elsewhere' becomes hers and ours In an early scene at a roller rink in Lincoln, Brandon's date tells him, 'You don't look like you are from around here' He teases out her idea of where she thinks he does come from 'Someplace beautiful' Brandon's world is strewn with cliches and disavowals, but like the bubble-gum-machine-quality ring he gives to Lana, they signify something beautiful

Feminist psychoanalytic readings of the process of film spectatorship have analyzed the gendered dimensions of the fetishism and disavowal its pleasures require. Not only is the viewer's suspension of disbelief necessary to enjoy the film illusion, but 'his' spectatorial desire is also affirmed specifically by disavowing female lack [2] Fetishism as a mastery of castration anxiety is an inadequate account of *female* visual pleasure, many feminist theorists have pointed out. *Boys* offers a chance to revisit issues of spectatorship and fetishism in relation to a quite literal scenario of genital (in)difference Brandon may experience lack in his own body (in the remarkable scene of his stripping and exposure, the film portrays a second, intact Brandon looking on from the periphery), but for him girls are complete – and completely captivating. Brandon's (clean-shaven, small-boned, teen-magazine heartthrob) gender fiction sustains Lana's fantasy When Brandon's persecutors force him to prove his sex to Lana, she tells him to keep his pants on 'Think about it I *know* you're a guy,' she insists.[3] *Boys* marks a convergence of queer, feminist and what I would like to call (for reasons that will become clear) girl-viewer optics.

Fetishism is operative in the very form of the question 'what is

2 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* trans Celia Britton et al (Bloomington IN Indiana University Press 1982) Laura Mulvey Visual pleasure and narrative cinema *Screen* vol 16 no 3 (1975) pp 6–18

3 Interviewed in Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdottir s 1998 documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* Lana Tisdel says that she told Brandon not to show her I ll tell them what they want to hear what we believe The language in *Boys* merely substitutes what we know is true for what we believe

this love we have for the invert. boy or girl?', which presumes and believes in 'love' without deciding whether the 'boy or girl?' is at stake. I'd like to analyze how fetishism shapes the formal construction of a scene that both consolidates the romance – it is the couple's first sex scene – and transfers vision. knowledge. desire and narration to Lana Brandon has returned to Falls City to woo Lana (fleeing a court date in Lincoln that would officially register his identity as female and felon. and might cause his incarceration), and she joins him on the riverbank outside the plant where she works As Brandon adjusts Lana's naked torso beneath him, she murmurs, 'I feel like I'm in a trance' The line addresses on one level the prurient question of how the sexual partner of a transgendered or passing woman can avoid noticing the absence of the penis But it works on a fantasmatic level as well. We watch a remarkable. lingering overhead closeup of Lana's face as she receives oral stimulation (in qualifying the film for an R rating, the censors objected to the shot's duration), her expression and the musical accompaniment rise in intensity and climax with a cut to a low-angle point-of-view shot of moving lights that resolve into streetlights seen from a car A match cut to Lana's open mouth in the next shot shows her partying in a car with Brandon and her girlfriends Candace (Alicia Goranson) and Kate (Alison Folland) at her side. The slow-motion shot relays her sexual euphoria with Brandon into an image of pleasure felt in her female friends' company.

The next scene in Lana's bright yellow, teenager's bedroom strengthens this connection, as she narrates the sexual encounter to the girls In response to their prodding, Lana sinks back between them where they lie on the bed passing a bong and covers her eyes 'I can't talk about it. it is too intense!' The girls prompt her to continue and the camera cuts from a tight overhead shot of all three girls on the bed to an overhead closeup of just Lana that is strikingly reminiscent of the orgasm shot we've seen just a few moments before Within what is now a subjective flashback to the sex scene. Brandon penetrates and pleasures her, and a shot from Lana's optical point of view reveals the hint of a cleavage in Brandon's chest Lana doesn't verbalize this moment when the film cuts back to the closeup of her face on the pillow, but next a series of shots in flashback show her touching Brandon's jeans at the crotch, then tracing his jawline, and looking into his eyes 'Well, did you do it?' her friends demand, the question seeming inadequately to grasp the pleasure that we have been able to see on her face, both in the protracted shot during the oral sex scene and in the shots in which she now recalls it. 'What do you think?', she answers with satisfaction

Why is this a satisfactory answer? Lana's flashback is offered to us visually, so we know 'more' than her friends If we credit her with now 'knowing' about Brandon's gender performance, we might understand why she leaves the question's presumptive 'yes' answer

unspoken (it all depends what is meant by 'it') But because the flashback transpires during screen time in which she is clearly narrating to her friends, I believe that its mise-en-scene is available to her diegetic interlocutors as well. In other words, both her pleasure (which we see in the act and in its later recollection in the company of the other girls at home in her bed) and her undecided question – 'what do you think?' (or even 'boy or girl?') – are conveyed to us *as if* we were among the girls.[4] We are left to decide whether we think she did it and what we think 'it' is, whether and what we think she knows, and whether we think the knowing worth thinking about Though the narration seems to disavow a genital 'fact' at this juncture, this is not presented as a costly disavowal, as tragic misrecognition, instead Lana's desire is renewed as she becomes the film's narrator Thus, on a formal level, the film authorizes the investment of the girl auditors who are our stand-ins (stand-ins who at this moment are lying down – in bed talking about 'boys', a classic topos of girls' culture) Brandon's portrayal as 'one of the girls' partying in the car presents him not as 'castrated' but as a crucial link in a discursive circuit of pleasure and belief.

It is when we recall the implied presence of the 'boys', John Lotter (Peter Sarsgaard) and Tom Nissen (Brendan Sexton III), whom we have so frequently seen partying with the girls, that castration could be said to re-enter the fetishistic equation Brandon's murderers are not long offscreen The film's firm location in the 'feminized' realm of melodrama, romance and tears actually allows male inadequacy, impotence, rage and panic to be presented vividly and almost sympathetically[5] 'Boys don't cry' might be seen as a shaming performative mantra for Brandon – throughout his persecution he strives to 'take it like a man' (the film's original title) But his murderers also try to 'defend' themselves and define their masculinity through negative attributes (boys don't, for example, want to see how they depend on, resemble and fail to communicate with girls) and finally explode into violence The scary, volatile intimacy with John and Tom that characterizes Lana's and then Brandon's lives also includes the viewer, a chilling reminder that it is also a 'we' who fear and despise the invert

The box-office and critical success of *Boys* surprised almost everyone involved But remember *girls cry*, at least according to market wisdom It seems to me that in the midst of a notable recalibration of popular entertainment to take into account the knowing genre tastes of adolescent and teenage girls and young women (from *Titanic* [James Cameron, 1997] to *Scream* [Wes Craven, 1996] and its sequels), *Boys'* success makes sense Still, the film's crossover qualifications have been seen as trivializing the gender crossing that Brandon performed and died for, as well as the film's others' stakes in the real. Apparently the emphasis on a central love story left no room even to include a character representing

[4] Indeed this undecidability between visual and verbal information, present and past perception and fantasy is what is crucial in the bedroom scene When Lana removes her hands from her eyes she tells her friends then we took off our clothes and went swimming Instead we see Lana climb on top of Brandon in a flashback shot whispering Don t be scared As for the swimming story Kate responds Yeah, right

[5] In the film s melodramatic topography, the 'public sphere is represented only by nightmarish law enforcement agents and nightclubs its many outdoors locations are adjunct spaces to a desolate domesticity

6 Lana Tisdel's story has been and
will be told in other ways
Although she signed a release
early in Peirce's project, and
another when the film was taking
more definite shape, after being
shown the finished film she filed
a lawsuit In the interim she had
become involved in a competing
production based on Brandon's
story and was represented by its
Los Angeles lawyer The suit
objected to her being depicted in
Boys Don't Cry as unfazed by
the discovery that Brandon,
whom she thought was a man
was a female transvestite and/or
transsexual who was later
murdered The film's rendition of
her relationship with Brandon as
a modern-day gender-bending
Romeo and Juliet was
inaccurate the suit claimed In
sum the said motion picture
falsely depicts plantiff as a
lesbian as well as someone
who it rather symptomatically
goes on to reiterate was
unbothered by the discovery
that Brandon was a female
transvestite and/or transsexual
who was later murdered' A Los
Angeles judge refused to halt the
film's opening, reasoning that
Lana Tisdel's story was public
information and the case was
later settled out of court
Conversations with Associate
Producer Bradford Simpson
quoting from the court papers
3 and 4 January 2001

Philip Devine, another, African-American, victim of John and Tom's
murderous rage that night (or indeed *any* people of colour in
Nebraska) Even from within my emphasis on girls' perspectives, the
murder of Candace (a composite character based in part on the third
murder victim Lisa Lambert) – an even more obvious stand-in for
the sympathetic female viewer than Lana – could be seen as
curiously unmourned She is gunned down in front of her baby, who
then disappears from the last scene, the fate of neither is mentioned
in the 'where are they now' titles that precede the end credits, titles
that carefully elide the film's fictional world and the events upon
which it was based We *are* informed that Lana herself had a baby
girl a few years after leaving Falls City and returned home to raise
her [6] Candace's brutal and gratuitous murder and the shrinking of
Lana's horizons exist on a continuum of everyday violence against
women These are themes that popular women's genres address; *Boys*
rightly recognizes that Brandon Teena's story raised them too

Rather than dwelling on the commercial constraints or mimetic
responsibilities that dog independent films' attempts to tell queer
stories, think of what a cultural sea change in imaginings of gender
and sexuality we are experiencing if these attempts now resonate
with popular forms and audiences. I am not surprised that girls and
women in particular are receptive to radical permutations of romance
such as *Boys* Djuna Barnes tells us that it has always been the girl
in the boy, the prince in the girl that galvanized our desire; perhaps
the 'queerness' of romance need no longer be disavowed *Boys*
female performers themselves worked on some of the most
progressive popular youth films and television shows (Swank was
featured in the film version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Fran Rubel
Kazui, 1992), Goranson grew up on the long-running ABC sitcom
Roseanne, and Folland starred in Alex Sichel's *All Over Me* (1997),
a lesbian independent feature depicting a somewhat more empowered
element of female youth culture than that of *Boys*' dead-end teens
And Chloe Sevigny 'flipped' to play the butch opposite *Dawson's
Creek*'s Michelle Williams in the made-for-HBO lesbian compilation
film *If These Walls Could Talk II* (2000), the segment was authored
by *All Over Me* writer Sylvia Sichel Do youth audiences recognize
the discontinuities as well as the continuum running from the WB
Network to *Boys Don't Cry*? Do girl viewers today 'get' feminism,
or grasp what I think is a cultural shift in the status of gay men,
lesbians and transgendered people? Do they see beyond makeup and
fashion, so aggressively marked to them in popular culture, to the
refiguring of desire and agency also being provoked there by
subcultures, activism and independent media? What do you think?

debate:

A reply to Sellors's 'mindless' approach to possible worlds

WARREN BUCKLAND

1 C Paul Sellors The impossibility of science fiction against Buckland's possible worlds *Screen*, vol 41, no 2 (2000), pp 203–16

2 Warren Buckland, 'Between science fact and science fiction Spielberg's digital dinosaurs possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism' *Screen* vol 40 no 2 (1999), pp 177–92

3 Sellors only stipulates without presenting in the form of a reasoned argument that my use of Bazin is 'arbitrary' and 'unconvincing yet Bazin is central to my argument about how possible worlds are realized in the cinema as I shall make clear towards the end of this reply Perhaps Sellors s discussion of my use of Bazin would have been more pertinent (for both readers of *Screen* and the agenda of my paper) than his outline of three versions of actualism for example

4 Michael J Loux, Introduction modality and metaphysics in Michael J Loux (ed) *The Possible and the Actual Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality* (Ithaca NY Cornell University Press 1979) p 30

In a recent issue of *Screen* appeared C. Paul Sellors's paper 'The impossibility of science fiction against Buckland's possible worlds',[1] a response to and critique of my paper 'Between science fact and science fiction: Spielberg's digital dinosaurs, possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism'.[2] What I find troubling in Sellors's response is that he fails to address the problem-driven nature of my research (since he is too concerned with the doctrines of possible world [PW] theory); he fails to address the PW theory my paper is based upon (a moderate realist view of mind-dependency called 'conceptualism'); he dismisses without argument or reason my use of André Bazin,[3] and he holds a dim view of the significance of digital technology in the film industry (as well as, presumably, film scholars' theorization of that technology) His response raises questions about whether his formulation of PW theory furthers film scholars' understanding of the 'object' of study (in this instance, digital images in blockbuster movies) or has little relevance to the object under study, and, more generally, raises questions about the criteria of adequacy a researcher holds for understanding the object of study and accepting a solution as correct He does nothing to dispel the common view of PW theory, that it is merely 'an exotic piece of metaphysical machinery, the armchair invention of a speculative ontologist'[4]

In this reply I shall now attempt to back up my reading of

5   Sellors, 'The impossibility of
    science fiction' p 203

Sellors's response. I welcome the opportunity to respond to Sellors's
critique because disputes not only clarify arguments, but test them.
Sellors misunderstands my reasons for focusing on digital
technology He writes '[Buckland] appears to get caught up in the
hyperbole surrounding digital technologies and misses the strong
metaphysical arguments at the core of the possible worlds thesis' [5]
Below I shall address the issue of the metaphysics of PWs. As for
the 'hyperbole' surrounding digital technologies, I would prefer to
say that my paper focuses on the widespread interest – both inside
and outside the film industry – in digital technologies The problem I
address focuses on the way spectators intuitively respond to the
nonexistent objects (specifically, the dinosaurs) in digital images in
films such as *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* (Steven Spielberg,
1993 and 1997), and I stated this problem in the opening paragraph

6   Buckland   Between science fact
    and science fiction   p 177

'Why do Spielberg's dinosaurs hold our attention and fascination?' [6]
The issue I address is not an artificial one that derives from a
theoretical discourse, but derives from the film industry and the
intuitions of spectators and industry commentators (journalists,
reviewers, film scholars, and so on). This 'real world' dimension is
the starting point of my research I begin from a problem in
contemporary cinema, and use PW theory as a way to try to say
something significant about that problem. As with any approach, PW
theory's object of study is generated from its own distinctive aims,
assumptions and criteria for the acceptability of solutions Unlike
Sellors, I am only interested in PW theory as a means to an end, as
a way of addressing a problem in contemporary cinema and,
hopefully, extending the boundaries of film theory

   Despite his apparent command of PW theory, Sellors has failed to
identify or mention a development in PW theory central to my
argument He writes '[Buckland's] evocation of the concept of
possible worlds .   contradicts modal philosophy and even recent

7   Sellors   The impossibility of
    science fiction'   p 209

work in the theory of fiction' [7] But this criticism is simply based on
Sellors's limited understanding of PW theory. He goes on to outline
my position 'The problem, it seems, is that [Buckland] attempts to

8   Ibid

turn a metaphysical thesis into an epistemological one' [8] This is
certainly correct, except that it is not a problem – it is a corrective
to the metaphysics of modal realism (a counter-intuitive ontology in
which unrealized possibilities are posited to actually exist) The
version of PW theory I subscribe to is called *conceptualism*, and is
represented in PW literature most forcefully by the philosopher

9   Nicholas Rescher 'The ontology
    of the possible   in Loux (ed),
    The Possible and the Actual
    pp 166–81 See also Rescher, *A
    Theory of Possibility* (Oxford
    Blackwell 1975), and 'The
    concept of nonexistent possibles ,
    in his *Essays in Philosophical
    Analysis* (Pittsburgh PA
    University of Pittsburgh Press,
    1969)

Nicholas Rescher [9] Conceptualism offers a more modest view of PWs
than a modal realist view. Rescher argues that PWs can only have a
linguistic or epistemological reality, that they are constructs of
language and the mind The modal realist approach, formulated by a
number of language philosophers (such as David Lewis) to overcome
the limitations of the logical positivists' verificationist theory of
meaning, returns to the metaphysics and ontology of pre-

10 The Language Analysis tradition incorporates the analytic philosophy of Frege Carnap Moore Russell Ryle and Wittgenstein the structural linguistics of Saussure the pragmatics of Habermas and the semiotics of C S Peirce For an outline of their work, and its relation to film theory see Warren Buckland *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (New York and Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2000) pp 15–17

11 Rescher The ontology of the possible, p 170

12 Ibid, p 168

13 Sellors The impossibility of science fiction p 212

14 Ibid p 206

Enlightenment philosophy (that is, before epistemology and the Language Analysis tradition).[10] Modal realists postulate that PWs are independent of the mind (or 'mindless' as Nicholas Rescher prefers to phrase it)[11] Rescher finds this step to be too much of a backwards leap, and so he attempts to develop an approach to possible worlds that takes into consideration developments in epistemology and Language Analysis The result is a conceptualist theory in which PWs are conceived as mind-dependent.

The following passage clearly and straightforwardly outlines Rescher's mind-dependent, conceptualist approach to PWs:

> exactly what can the existential status of the possible-but-unrealized state of affairs be? Clearly – ex hypothesi – the state of affairs or things at issue does not exist as such: only actual things or states of affairs can unqualifiedly be said to exist, not those that are possible but unrealized. By definition, only the actual will ever exist in the world, never the unactualized possible. For the world does not have two existential compartments, one including the actual and another that includes the unactual Of course, unactualized possibilities can be conceived, entertained, hypothesized, assumed, and so on That is to say, they can, in a way, exist – or 'subsist' if one prefers – not, of course, unqualifiedly in themselves, but in a relativized manner, as the objects of certain intellectual processes. But it goes without saying that if their ontological footing is to rest on this basis, then they are clearly mind-dependent[12]

PWs are mind-dependent because they cannot be located in nature, only in the thought processes and language of humans. And PW-conceptualism does not lead to idealism because it can clearly distinguish between actual objects and states of affairs, which are independent of the mind, and PWs, which are inherently mind-dependent. With this corrective account in mind, it becomes a straightforward matter to reject outright the final five pages of Sellors's response, because these pages are framed with the phrase 'Given that possible worlds are not mind-dependent'.[13]

I was surprised to read Sellors's view that digital technology does not effect a change or transformation in the cinema (perhaps he is attempting to avoid the charge of technological determinism) In relation to special effects, he writes 'Assuming for the moment that Buckland is correct and films like *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *The Lost World* (1997) can render possible worlds, then he has to justify his implicit assertion that digital technologies are doing something that optical technologies are incapable of'[14] The specificity of digital images in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* that I am attempting to convey is very similar to Vivian Sobchack's recent attempt in her anthology *Meta-Morphing* to define the specificity of digital morphing In her introduction Sobchack notes that Part II of her

15 Vivian Sobchack 'Introduction in Vivian Sobchack (ed) *Meta-Morphing Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change* (Minneapolis MI University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p xviii

16 Sobchack "At the still point of the turning world" metamorphing and media-stasis in Sobchack (ed) *Meta-Morphing* p 138

17 Joseba Gabilondo Morphing Saint Sebastian masochism and masculinity in *Forrest Gump* in Sobchack (ed), *Meta Morphing* p 186

18 Noel Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton NJ Princeton University Press 1988) p 149 The other two types of cinematic representation Carroll discusses are depiction (an image of Perkins in *Psycho* also depicts a man) and nominal portrayal (an image of Perkins in *Psycho* nominally portrays Norman Bates) These three types of portrayal are not mutually exclusive but hierarchical with physical portrayal as the foundation Therefore all photographic live action images first and foremost physically portray their model

19 Sellors The impossibility of science fiction p 207

20 Ibid

anthology focuses on 'the specificity of morphing as both a digital practice and a novel form of figuration that emerges primarily from the technological imagination'. She goes on to argue that digital morphing is 'a novel form of visual representation [that] allows a new way of seeing, adds a new dimension to the cultural Imaginary, and ultimately "transforms" philosophical thought and narratological structures' [15] Sobchack refers to Bazin to frame her own discussion of digital morphing in the photo-realistic image, and argues that digital morphing 'radically transform[s] the spatial and temporal grounding of a photo-realist cinema that up to now has been indexically related to human physical existence as it is daily experienced in space and time'.[16] And Joseba Gabilondo also refers to Bazin 'taking Bazin's theories to their latest consequence, computer technology has pushed "total cinema" into a new order of reality – the hyperreal – in which the representation of the fantastic does not delegitimate realism but rather legitimates it as a stronger form of realism' [17] Many other film scholars have also engaged seriously with the digital revolution and its effects on the cinema It is up to Sellors to engage critically with this research, rather than simply dismiss it as hyperbole or as being afflicted with technological determinism

How can one explain the impact and popularity of *Jurassic Park*, *The Lost World* and similar films without taking into consideration the innovative digital realization (based on photographic credibility) of previously unobservable, nonreferential dinosaurs – in other words, a photo-realistic image that is not based on physical portrayal? The term 'physical portrayal' originates from Monroe Beardsley, and is used by Noel Carroll in his analysis of Bazin's work Carroll defines physical portrayal in the following way 'The first level of cinematic representation is physical portrayal That is, every shot in a live-action photographic film physically portrays its model – a definite object, person, place, or event that can be designated by a singular term It is in this sense that *Psycho* represents Anthony Perkins '[18] Sellors argues that optical special effects produce the same effects as digital special effects, and attempts to put across this view by offering me a challenge: 'If [*Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World*] constitute a possible world, then Buckland, if I follow his argument, should also be able to demonstrate that films enhanced with realist optical special effects fail to articulate possible worlds' [19] He then offers several examples Firstly, *The Last Laugh* 'in *The Last Laugh* (1924), Murnau and Schufftan quite convincingly employ models and mirrors to create a setting which does not exist' [20] But the setting does exist as an observable profilmic event, which has been physically portrayed, or recorded, using the nineteenth-century technologies of optics, mechanics and photochemistry The images of the models in the film can be compared and contrasted to the models outside the film In other words, both the models and the film images of those models

exist in the real world The optical special effects therefore fail to articulate a possible world. Sellors's second example is *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977). This film was, of course, re-released in 1997 with digital special effects, which Lucas added because the optical technology in 1977 could not create the effects he wanted, making Sellors's use of *Star Wars* to argue that there is no difference between optical and digital special effects puzzling In relation to his next example, *2001*, Sellors writes: 'I .. have difficulties believing that digital renderings convince normal spectators that Spielberg's dinosaurs occupy the film's diegesis representationally in a manner different from the way that the spaceship "Discovery" hangs in space'[21] But surely 'Discovery' is an observable profilmic model that is physically portrayed, and both it and its images exist in the real world, and can be compared and contrasted to one another In *The Lost World* and *Jurassic Park*, on the other hand, no physical portrayal is involved in the production of the digital images of dinosaurs

Viewed from the perspective of the conceptualist approach to PWs, my argument that *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* present a PW becomes clearer As I use the term, PWs are conceptual possibilities. In *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* these conceptual possibilities are manifest on screen What this means is that these conceptual possibilities which, by definition, are nonmanifest and nonobservable, are conferred, although only in the visual and aural realm of film, a manifest and observable status The conceptual PW (that exists on the *de dicto* level) has been conferred a *de re* status But how, if it is not physically portrayed by means of optics, mechanics and photochemistry? By means of digital special effects.[22] More specifically, the distinctiveness of the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* is that they are visible digital special effects masquerading as invisible digital special effects The images of the dinosaurs are not produced optically, which means that they are not observable profilmic events physically portrayed using the nineteenth-century technologies of optics, mechanics and photochemistry, and so a digital image of a dinosaur cannot be compared and contrasted with its profilmic model or referent, because its referent does not exist in the real world I therefore conclude that the dinosaurs exist in a conceptual PW, and that this conceptual PW is being realized on screen via digital technology The PW cannot be realized via optical technology, because there is nothing for the optical technology to record (or physically portray) Moreover – and crucially – the digital special effects attempt to create the illusion that the images of dinosaurs are caused by profilmic referents (real, observable dinosaurs) – that is, that the dinosaurs are physically portrayed by means of optics, mechanics and photochemistry More generally, the PW is presented as if it were mind-independent And this, finally, is the reason why Spielberg's digital dinosaurs hold our attention and fascination

21 Ibid pp 208–9

22 Here I go beyond Rescher's argument for he reasons that PWs only exists on the *de dicto* level Sellors finds my extension of PW theory inherently incorrect for he suggests that I should confine my research to the original boundaries of PW theory which has no interest in the technologies and techniques that render these worlds knowable (Sellors 'The impossibility of science fiction p 204) But if research is limited to the aims assumptions, criteria for the acceptability of solutions and so on of the approach from which the researcher is borrowing then nothing new would be discovered, and no new insight would be generated that tries to solve problems This is primarily a metatheoretical issue about the context of discovery of ideas and whether or not there exist mechanistic rules for discovering new ideas I am of the opinion that the context of discovery cannot be mechanized

reports

Defining Cult Movies: the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste, Nottingham, 17–19 November 2000

There were moments at the Defining Cult Movies conference, held at the Broadway Cinema in Nottingham, where the venue managed to accentuate certain themes of the conference. On the way to panel sessions – held in the cinema's seminar room, mezzanine and small screen – badge-wearing academics would find themselves squeezing past growing queues of cinemagoers waiting to see one of the number of cult films scheduled to coincide with the weekend event From *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1972) and *Badlands* (Terrence Malick, 1974) to *Quatermass and the Pit* (Rudolph Cartier, 1958), by far the most popular screening was a double-bill of British children's television favourites, *Bagpuss* and *The Clangers* With a sell-out audience, including a significant number of conference delegates, the problematic question of what and who defines the cult status of media products was continually, and literally, posed

It should come as no surprise that a conference set upon 'defining' the cult movie spent most of its time realizing that no clear definition was available As someone who comes from an American Studies, rather than exclusively Film Studies, background, I appreciated some offerings on the type and history of the (mainly exploitation) movies under discussion Over the course of the friendly three-day event, numerous film cycles, genres and microgenres were outlined and explored Loosely linked by their acquired cult credentials, these included the beach party film (with papers by Bill Osgerby and Andrew Caine), the biker film (Andrew Syder), blaxploitation (Eithne Quinn), Northwestploitation (James Lyons), the Spanish horror film (Andrew Willis), the

blaxploitation horror film (Steven Schneider), the LSD movie (Harry Benshoff), the kung-fu movie (Leon Hunt), Asian-American cultism (Julian Stringer), European art cinema (Mark Betz), and the cinematic oeuvre of cult auteurs such as James Whale (Matt Becker) and David Lynch (Peter Kramer) From *Beach Blanket Bingo* (William Asher, 1965) to *Blacula* (William Crain, 1972), the conference witnessed an embarrassment of cult riches

Making use of the Broadway's screen facilities, numerous papers were accompanied by choice extracts of the camp, coarse and subcultural elements that inform, and help constitute, the critical baseline of the conference 'oppositional taste'. While not without the usual degree of technological hiccups – Harry Benshoff struggling heroically to explain the psychedelic colours of LSD film *The Trip* (Roger Corman, 1967) in a clip that would only play in black and white – the conference provided a consistent level of high-quality and visually illustrative papers It was the range of material and theory marshalled under the 'cult movie' rubric that made the event an especially reflexive forum Accepting that definitions of cult movies (and cult television, in the case of a provocative paper on television seriality given by Roberta Pearson and Sara Jones), cannot be reduced to essentialist models of form and production, the overall ground of analysis moved from textual critique and genre evolution to the status of cult itself The conference returned time and again to the means by which cult is supposed to exist, and is frequently positioned, against 'mainstream cinema' While papers were extremely diverse (to the degree that being at 'cross-purposes' seemed a classificatory insight), there developed a common interest in the stakes and generative distinctions produced in and through the subcultural ideologies of what has become variously known as cult, trash or paracinema.

In his 1995 *Screen* article, 'Trashing the

Academy' (vol 36, no 4, pp 371–93), Jeffrey Sconce described the elastic textual category of paracinema as 'less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus' Papers that specifically addressed the politics of the said 'reading protocol' provided the liveliest moments of discussion In a plenary session on the 'Sexual Politics of Cult Movies', Joanne Hollows and Jacinda Read provided a lucid critique of the 'masculinity of cult' Moving from the theoretical premiss that the transgressive and resistant world of cult has been naturalized as masculine, set against a mainstream culture persistently gendered as feminine, their suggestive double-act discussed both the consumption practices that constitute cult fandom and, drawing upon Ian Hunter's notion of the 'fan-boy', how fan discourse has been constituted in academic criticism Ultimately, their suggestion is that the rewards of cult fandom are available to those who have mastery of its masculine dispositions, and that cult fandom is open to women who opt to be culturally 'one of the boys' At a conference with a roughly equal number of male and female participants, it was one of the few papers explicitly to gender the status of cult

From a different perspective, Mark Shiel asked why films should be labelled 'cult' at all Suspicious of the term as a politically weak concept, over-attached to marginality and valorizing contemporaneous pleasure, Shiel identified cult as complicit in a dehistoricizing tendency that diminishes the political effectivity of cultural artefacts In making this claim, he focused upon the cult status given to independent filmmaking of the 1960s, specifically the work of Roger Corman and Peter Fonda. Influenced by neo-Marxist scepticism about the fetishizing of minority identities, cult is read by Shiel as an obfuscating category, fundamentally denying the sociohistorical conditions in which

particular movies were made and had political effects. At a weekend forum of self-declared cultists, this was contentious stuff. Notwithstanding the nostalgia for historicist and political 'authenticity' in Shiel's paper, the argument seemed at odds with a good number of panel sessions demonstrating just the kind of sociohistorical readings denied or absent in Shiel's proposed, and dismissive, understanding of 'cult'. Eithne Quinn's insightful contextualizing of *Superfly* (Gordon Parks, Jnr, 1972), Andrew Willis's political reading of the horror genre in Franco's Spain, and Steve Chibnall's evolutionary analysis of Mike Hodges's 1972 film *Get Carter* ('from underground cult to overground classic') were cases in point Despite its conceptual limitations, Shiel's paper at least had the value of provocation, the Defining Cult Movies conference was by no means an uncritical event preaching cultism to the converted.

While accommodating certain warnings and footnotes about the status of cult, the conference was, for the most part, a critical ingathering of scholars attempting to clear space for the academic legitimacy of 'illegitimate' film. This turned upon the types and trajectories of oppositional taste Pierre Bourdieu's work on taste and distinction in the last two decades has levelled a continuing impact within the fields of sociology and cultural studies The use and inscription of subcultural capital in the taxonomy and teaching of film is something that has only recently begun to expand, however Indeed, if the Defining Cult Movies conference had a figurative rationale, it was arguably to map issues of taste and subculture onto screen territory that has been sparsely theorized in any deliberate fashion. The idea of cult film is, of course, nothing new, it can be traced back to the formulations of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1960s and beyond However, in the climate inspired by Bourdieu, more attention has been placed on the means by which notions of the 'cult' and the

'mainstream' have been constructed in terms of ideology, illegitimacy, opposition and knowledge capital Critics such as Jeffrey Sconce and Mark Jancovich have begun to examine how such categories of classification produce, create and maintain distinctions In the context of film, this has informed a range of critical issues about the ways in which struggles over cinematic taste are classed and gendered, about the cult appropriation of specific movies by selected audiences, and about the form and dissemination of fan competences.

Reflecting the spirit of the conference – what can genuinely, and unpretentiously, be described as a critical intervention – both Sconce and Jancovich sought to address the means by which the capital of cult can be used in both cultural and pedagogical terms In the final plenary session, entitled 'Reflecting Back and Thinking Forward the Theory and Practice of Studying Cult Movies', Sconce asked how, in the context of Film Studies' academic battle for legitimation, cult or fringe films might be used The answer to his paper, playfully headed 'teaching bad films to good students', was the value and effect of 'distanciation' Using Dwain Esper's 1934 film *Maniac* as an example, Sconce argued that low-budget exploitation films can interrogate codes of realism far more successfully than films in which narrative assemblage is fluent and less disjointed. Cult film can, in short, reveal the naturalized relation between story and plot, opening up questions about the narrative illusions of time and space, the ideology of cinematic representation, and the broad question of historical poetics

Mark Jancovich, who is director of the Institute of Film Studies at the University of Nottingham, the organizing body of the conference, gave an alternative view of the pedagogic utility of cult movies Rather than use films to distanciate, he suggested that subcultural knowledges can be utilized to engage students, to build with materials that students may, in fact, be familiar with. Jancovich had a broader point to make about the way that academics often fail to see themselves as fans, or, alternatively, construct themselves as authoritative fans. Indeed, the self-conscious relationship between fandom and academia was a pervasive theme of the conference and it became a procedural habit to acknowledge the often confused position from which people were speaking While this sometimes took an amusingly confessional form – 'my name is Dr X and I have been a splatterpunk fan for six years' – the issue for Jancovich was the constancy with which boundaries of taste are drawn and redrawn, in culture as well as in the classroom If Sconce saw in cult film the value of distanciation, Jancovich anchored his comments to the overriding issue of distinction

In my own confessional mode, I should say that I had no specific cult investment at the beginning of the conference The weekend was profitable in a number of ways, however Not only were the majority of papers instructive on their own terms, the conference also reinforced the intellectual benefits of themed discussion While I felt worn ragged from my exposure to cult excess (with papers by Harmony Wu, Rebecca Feasey, and Moya Luckett winning the prize for film clips in the categories 'worst taste', 'highest camp' and 'most bizarre'), the conference held together extremely well. Benefiting from a limited amount of competing panels and a large number of plenary lectures, Defining Cult Movies was an engaged and collaborative forum teasing out the critical significance of a disparate range of personal obsessions and film fascinations A platform for cult indulgence, the conference was also, and more significantly, a worthy contribution to the discussion of subcultural capital and the economy of cinematic taste

Paul Grainge

reviews

review article: Theory misadventure and critical choices

Toby Miller and Robert Stam (eds), *A Companion to Film Theory* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 500pp.

Robert Stam and Toby Miller (eds), *Film and Theory: an Anthology* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 873pp.

Robert Stam, *Film Theory: an Introduction* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 320pp.

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

1 *A Companion to Film Theory Film and Theory an Anthology* and *Film Theory an Introduction* hereafter referred to respectively as *Companion, Anthology,* and *Introduction*

2 Neither volume gives information on the contributors I have used prior knowledge and detective work in these summaries of their locations

3 *Introduction* p 24 Unfortunately there are textual oddities about both these references Stam places the Mexico City Lumière screening in December 1895 The first public screening at the Grand Café in Paris was in that month and the first non-French public screening was in London in February 1896 The first Mexico City screening was in August 1896 Stam refers us to Carl J Mora *Mexican Cinema Reflexions of a Society* (Berkeley CA California University Press 1989), who gets the month right, so this must be a transcription error All the other English-language versions of the Gorky I know have 'It is not life but its shadow In *Theory* it comes out as 'It is no life but its shadow This is quite poetic but probably another transcription or typographical error

Here are three linked books from the same publisher, all three with the words 'film' and 'theory' in their marginally different titles.[1] *Companion* and *Anthology* are co-edited by two professors in the same department (Cinema Studies) of the same university (New York), and have in common a specific time-frame· though acknowledging a few influences and holdovers, they deal only with the period since 1960. *Companion* has nineteen commissioned chapters, written predominantly by academics living and/or working in the USA *Anthology* has forty-four pre-existing pieces, mostly by North Americans and Europeans, with a few contributions from Latin America and Asia [2] The individually-authored *Introduction*, on the other hand, attempts to present the gist of theoretical arguments along the whole history, from 1896 with fairytale enchantment in Mexico City and not life but its shadow in Nizhni Novgorod,[3] to the special effects. polyphony and potential interactivity of digital media. Robert Stam is a film specialist with a wide range of interests, Toby Miller a cultural studies specialist with a strong commitment to film The stance of all three books is determinedly plural the local

introduction to *Anthology* summarizes its intended difference from
other collections as the ecumenical incorporation of a wide spectrum
of film-theoretical grids, the attempt to reconcile diachrony and
synchrony, history and system, and the attempt to register the shift
towards cultural studies, seen as a field where film theory is at once
an 'insider' and an 'outsider'.[4]

4 *Anthology*, p xviii The aim to
reconcile diachrony and
synchrony history and system is
not met An ambitious aim
probably difficult to achieve if
one has excluded the analysis of
specific films as is the case
here

Other good reasons for adopting stances of plurality and openness
are the aftermath of the implosion of the psychoanalytically-based
theory of subject-positioning and the growth of interest in ways in
which real spectators and audiences consume film and other media
To which one should add a substantial increase in the number of
serious studies of specific issues in film history, the development of
enhanced public appetite for cultural, aesthetic and historical
knowledge, attributable in part to the liveliness of postmodernism,
and in part (in the UK at least) to the development and effects of
film, media and cultural education in the last quarter-century This is
matched by increased sophistication in serious critical and, to a marked
extent, journalistic reviewing response Not everybody has studied
film or media theory, but many have, and the requirements of the
study have made themselves felt But there may also be a weakness
running alongside these reasons to be cheerful Stam and Miller want
us to have a wide spectrum of film-theoretical grids. Indeed we
probably have such a spectrum already But might it not be more
satisfying if, as well as the spectrum, there could be one grid which,
without controlling all the other grids, could set a framework for them
to play in, function as mother ship where the satellites might store
the product of their voyages? No, no, I hear you cry, we don't want
it! We don't want a mistress-system! We've had ideology. We've
had psychoanalysis. Intellectual honesty demands that the validity of
each potential approach be explored and assessed independently, and
then links made between them as and when appropriate

I have every sympathy with this respect for the specific lights cast
by the disciplines, I agree with it, but I think we probably also need
some more dynamic relationships included in the system. Reading
Stam's and Miller's trilogy has the effect of reinforcing me in this
thought. Only one of the books, the *Companion*, can be said to be
successful It does not have a structure problem because the format –
nineteen individuals writing free-standing pieces about zones they
know – works well in its own terms. The sequence runs
commonsensically, from treatment of more familiar and perhaps more
basic material through to more recent and/or more 'different' stuff.
There are well-organized and judicious accounts of authorship by
James Naremore and genre by Sarah Berry Naremore does not quite
do justice to authorship's role as itself a term in film language, a
practical aesthetic concept, but his chapter is balanced and potentially
productive because it allows for collaboration producers, actors,
studios and, I would add, writers and cinematographers, can all make

5 *Companion* pp 9–24

6 Ibid pp 25–44

7 Ibid pp 84–104

authorial contributions [5] Berry's discussion of genre establishes that its continuing strength in filmic, audience and industrial terms, lies in its hybrid and combinatory qualities, but is a bit less convincing on both its developmental qualities and its instability She also overstates its social control-type aspects.[6]

Warren Buckland gives a useful account of the first and third periods of film semiotics, film language and specificity, transformational grammar, enunciation and pragmatics,[7] some aspects of which I shall return to later. But the best essay in the book is Richard Allen's chapter addressing the conceptual confusions and misunderstandings manifested in psychoanalytic film theory. I shall try to summarize it here

Freudian version film is a fantasy or dream that the medium endows with illusion of presence (Metz's 'imaginary signifier') It thus mobilizes wish-fulfilment and causes the subject to regress to an early state of development But these features may be construed as normal (rather than pathological), contingent (rather than necessary) parts of spectatorship Since regression can be associated with perversion, the pleasures offered by cinema are perverse. One such perversion is fetishism. The imaginary signifier is like a fetish, it allows us to perceive what is imaginary as being real, and hence to disavow our knowledge that what we see is only a series of images This takes us out of fantasy and into visual illusion Another perversion is voyeurism. We are looking at people who cannot see us, as though through a keyhole. But if the film or television screen functions like a keyhole, how could we disavow knowledge of the medium, or its illusory nature?

Lacanian version by analogy with the infant before the mirror, cinematic representation allows the spectator to identify with the position of the camera and therefore think she/he is author and owner of the visual field of the film, while actually lacking both position and field, which are the product of the system of representation But this analogy does not work the spectator does not engage with representation in this way, and the system does not have the power ascribed to it. The imaginary wholeness of the image is severed (castrated) by the (editing) cut Narrative cinema alternates between identification with plenitude (ownership of the field) and severance (the cut) This alternation may allow the spectator to perceive her/his lack. This can be palliated by reverse-field cutting; the position lost with the first image is vicariously restored by identification with the look of a character who appears in the second image and claims ownership of the field of the first But film style does not operate in such a simple, crudely-formulated way, and spectator involvement with film characters is also more complicated. Engagement with a fictional world involves imagination, not necessarily desire The desire to know is not necessarily sexual Fantasy and imagination are not coterminous

Feminist version the voyeuristic look is male, active and sadistic, its object is the female body, which threatens the look by evoking castration. The threat can be neutralized by fetishising the image of woman, or by punishing her But this would exclude the possibility of an active female look, or of active female characters. Active and passive forms of involvement are not gender-bound in the way Laura Mulvey's theory presupposes. Popular narratives are not simply patriarchal or Oedipal Films offer diverse positions of involvement Many Hollywood movies (like other aspects of US popular culture) use psychoanalytic elements in constructing plots and characters, but you do not then need a psychoanalytic theory to lay these bare or unlock a hidden meaning Allen's chapter is densely argued, slightly repetitive at one point, but it does provide impetus for 'reflection and reconsideration', his expressed hope for it.[8]

8 Ibid pp 123–45

The level declines a bit in the middle of *Companion*, but there is a good chapter by Henry Jenkins on issues around digital transformation, and the chapters by Charles Ramírez Berg on the Mexican popular artist J.G Posada and Ira Bhaskar on David Bordwell's 'historical poetics' raise some interesting issues[9]

9 Ibid pp 234–61 363–86 387–412

Anthology, by contrast, is a nightmare. The forty-four chapters or articles are grouped into thirteen parts, each part having its own introduction and containing between two and five pieces The sheer number of these parts, the ways in which the editors divide up the material between parts, and their running order, all pose brutally the problem of structure Beyond that they pose problems of historical interpretation and of intellectual judgment. And there is also a technical, editing problem

The breakdown of parts in *Anthology* is as follows I The Author II Film Language/Specificity III The Image and Technology IV Text and Intertext V The Question of Realism VI Alternative Aesthetics VII The Historical Spectator/Audience VIII Apparatus Theory IX The Nature of the Gaze. X Class and the Culture Industries. XI Stars and Performance XII Permutations of Difference XIII The Politics of Postmodernism[10] The system would seem to be as follows First, four (or perhaps five) parts of theory, alternating ABAB(A) between the more accessible and the more demanding, all relatively introductory. Second, three (or two) parts which combine theoretical discussion with the treatment of social issues, tending to privilege the latter, but not one-dimensionally Third, two further parts on psychoanalysis-based theory, with a strong feminist component Fourth, three ragbag parts, of which only the third has to go in any particular place – which is next to the fifth part. Fifth and finally, alone postmodernism.

10 Part IV Text and Intertext has one of the better introductions in *Anthology* It deals with semiotics and with genre though the four chapters in the Part are all about genre XII Permutations of Difference is about gender race identity and representation In XIII The Politics of Postmodernism the texts chosen do not limit postmodernism to its politics

Someone at Blackwell might helpfully have told the editors that you should not go for a thirteen-part anthology unless you have totally compulsive material and a strong editorial line The old-time star of the genre, Bill Nichols's *Movies and Methods*, had effectively

seven parts in Volume I and six in Volume II (nine years later)
Stam and Miller might sensibly have reshaped their thirteen parts as
five to seven – or, more brutally but perhaps more creatively,
decided which zones of their interest and material are genuinely
interesting or have a role to play in future developments – and left
the other stuff out

As it is, too broad a ground is approached too loosely, too much
is raised in terms which tend to be too short or too glancing – or at
any rate cannot do justice to the material or put it under critical
pressure when appropriate The editors do not use the introductions
to each part to comment on the essays, elucidate their internal
problems or the differences between them This is a deliberate

11 *Anthology* p xvi

decision,[11] but I think it is a mistake Instead of being critical
commentaries, the introductions tend to be extra essays on the part's
topic or bland overviews with a bit of history, a bit of context and a
list of further names and titles Meanwhile the editors are ignoring
more basic tasks. For example the second essay in part I, an extract
from Sandy Flitterman-Lewis's book *To Desire Differently Feminism
and the French Cinema*, begins *in media res*

> All of this becomes extremely complicated when we apply the
> enunciative model of authorship to women's work – when we
> attempt, in fact, to consider this theoretical apparatus in terms of
> the feminine – for the consideration of films made by women adds

12 Ibid p 16

> another, absolute, crucial, dimension to these discussions' [12]

All of what? The concept of enunciation has not been mentioned in
either of the two previous introductions or in the preceding essay.
Before the end of the first paragraph of the extract, the author raises
the further concept of the 'desiring look', which has not been set up
here either The only implicit reference, which might perhaps be taken
as a sort of trailer for both concepts, has been at the end of the second
paragraph of the introduction to *Anthology* as a whole (not to part I),
where Stam, after a long line of rhetorical questions beginning 'What

13 Ibid p xv

14 An editor concerned with the
history of culture, ideas or
language might also want to
comment on a stylistic aspect of
the quoted sentence Why does
Flitterman-Lewis write another
absolute crucial, dimension'?
(Why not another absolutely
crucial dimension? Or another
crucial dimension? Or another
important dimension? Or an
important different dimension?)

15 *Anthology*, pp 565–76 Odd in
that the chapter makes
absolutely no reference to the
British cinema Perhaps it got left
on the cutting-room floor

is cinema?', ends 'How are spectators differentiated in their desires?
What are the modes of narration in the cinema? How is the cinema
raced? Gendered? Sexualized?'[13] Questions one, two, four and five of
this final sequence might get you on the track, but not very far The
concerned reader wants an interpolation or note around 'this',
'another' and 'these discussions' to explain where we are, and would
I think also welcome notes on enunciation and desire [14]

A further example of this editorial dereliction Part X of *Anthology*
(Class and the Culture Industries) includes an interesting chapter first
published by John Hill in 1979, with the slightly odd title 'Ideology,
Economy and the British Cinema' [15] It is essentially a defence of the
concept of ideology, seen as a pattern of positive and exclusive
processes which demands reading in both aesthetic and variegated
social terms It also criticizes the British political economy tendency

for being unable to deal with the experience of artefacts or the consumption of media productions, and the Althusserian/Lacanian editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* for providing a reading of Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln* which is mainly experience and recreation of the artefact lashed onto an ill-founded account of the social and the historical Hill's chapter needs annotation and contextualization, especially in relation to the British 1970s in which it was written It needs explanation of who Murdock and Golding and all the other worthies (for example, Chambers et al , Hindess and Hirst) who flash in and out of its pages are, and perhaps comment on their achievement – for instance, by telling the reader how Golding and Murdock returned to the charge in 1991 and still could not relate media production to political economy The piece also has a potential aftermath, in that its basic problem, the relations of media production with social life, is a really serious and interesting one, the concept of ideology has proved inadequate to deal with or clarify it, and art/society relations are now addressed in different terms Without editorial intervention, this chapter will appear like a quaint and sawn-off museum piece The choices are roughly (a) to explain, or at least discuss the problem, (b) to explore the issue in another way; or (c) not to use this material despite its potential Its potential is locked up in the history of the path not taken But Miller's ten-page introduction to Part X fails to mention Hill's chapter at all![16]

16 Ibid , pp 539–51

Let us follow this topic sideways into *Introduction*, where Stam begins his treatment of ideology with five bland pages· Raymond Williams – Althusser – interpellation – symptomatic – ISAs – Lacan – subject construction – Renaissance perspective – suture – aagh! Suddenly, there are doubts For two pages we are in the realms of the closed-in – suffocatingly determinist – hysterical – ahistorical – monolithic – quasi-idealist! But maybe it is all right? The next seven pages go Comolli and Narboni – realism – transparency – Renaissance perspective (again) – MacCabe – Heath – Bordwell – Brecht, whom Stam treats well, in that he sets out quite clearly Brecht's main ideas and (signalling the return of his doubt over two more pages) some reasons why they often do not work –

17 *Introduction* pp 133–50

unpleasure [17] Then, without any balance-sheet or evaluation, Stam sweeps on into the happier fields of reflexivity, and ideology seems to go underground But the moment in which he returns to it is hysterical Reporting on Murray Smith's tripartite system for dealing with spectators' engagement with characters (recognition/alignment/allegiance), Stam blows a fuse at Smith's definition of allegiance, which he has summarized as 'cognitive and affective adherence to a character's values and moral point of view' It must not be a moral point of view, it must be an ideological one! Smith's disastrous substitution

throws out the collective achievements of the Frankfurt School,

18 Ibid p 245 Such a kneejerk
reaction to the concept of
morality is both alarming and
depressing As three pages later
Stam refers without
disapprobation to Nick Browne's
1975–76 article 'The spectator-in-
the-text the rhetoric of
Stagecoach which discusses the
film's guiding moral commentary
in relation to characters and
point of view it also seems
needlessly contradictory

19 Stam is also author or co author
of several books on specific film
theory topics, all of which are
better focused than *Introduction*
or *Anthology* In particular
Reflexivity in Film and Literature
(Ann Arbor MI Michigan
University Press 1985)
Subversive Pleasures (Baltimore
MD Johns Hopkins University
Press, 1989) *New Vocabularies
in Film Semiotics* (with Robert
Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-
Lewis) (London Routledge 1992)
Unthinking Eurocentrism (with
Ella Shohat) (London Routledge
1994) He acknowledges
reworking some of the material
from these here The interest of
the earlier work is much reduced
when telescoped or redelivered
without apparent redevelopment
It also draws attention to lack of
rigour in some of the earlier
formulations Perhaps Stam might
have gained from following one
or more of his theoretical
interests – semiotics dialogics?
– into a related critical project

20 Christian Metz *Film Language*
(Oxford Oxford University Press
1974), pp 108–82 *Language and
Cinema* (The Hague Mouton
1974) pp 208–53

21 Buckland, in *Companion*
pp 102–3

22 Christopher Williams After the
classic, the classical and
ideology the differences of
realism *Screen*, vol 35 no 3
(1994) pp 275–93

screen theory, and cultural studies, leaving a social void which the word 'moral', with its Victorian associations, cannot possibly fill [18]

At this stage Stam is more concerned to score points off both semiotics and cognitivism by setting them up back to back and making one of his rare adjudications· neither semiotics nor cognitivism is political enough The fact that ideology is assigned a key role in this operation demonstrates that (i) despite some reservations about ideology, Stam and Miller have shackled themselves to the concept, which (ii) they are not prepared to think about seriously and (iii) they confuse with politics. This explains why not commenting on Hill's chapter is more than just an editorial failing: it is an intellectual choice

Which brings us to the nub Despite the stance of plurality, the call for polyphony, the belief that there is something to be learned from virtually every critical school, Stam and Miller have an obvious agenda through and within film theory, to promote multi-culturalism and parity of genders, races and sexual orientations, and to comb through those segments of film theory which do not specifically align with the agenda (which unfortunately are the majority) for signs of possible support. This leads to a certain listlessness, a back and forth between condemnation (of the regressive or uncommitted) and hope (located in utopia, some aspects of postmodernism, and multiculturalism) They see their project as 'deprovincializing' film theory because it reports on the ideas which have fertilized film study from other disciplines, as well as the contribution film has made to other fields. But the habits of skating too fast from one area to another, not being tough enough to subject your own material to serious criticism, and always wanting to privilege the political, make it actually, even after 1671 pages, seem rather provincial [19]

The judgment Stam and Miller might have made, once they commissioned Buckland's piece on semiotics and Allen's piece on psychoanalysis for *Companion*, would have involved considering this did film theory take a wrong turning when it adopted the psychoanalytical Metz of the imaginary signifier, along with the political and aesthetic fantasies it seemed easy to articulate with psychoanalysis? And downgraded the potentials of the segmental analysis of the Grande Syntagmatique and heterogeneic model of multiplicity of codes proposed in *Language and Cinema*? [20] I take from Buckland the point that iconicity, mechanical duplication, movement and multiple images should not be seen as merely overlapping and intersecting with each other but as interacting dynamically [21] I think this proposed interaction could be connected with dialogics, reflexivity and the simultaneous interplay of realist, non-realist and anti-realist elements in many films [22] to reinforce a moderately systematic, culturally and aesthetically based account of film language Buckland also makes it clear that the third stage of

semiotics (the non- or, in Metz's case, the post-psychoanalytic one, which draws on cognitive science (Château and Colin), ideas about enunciation (Casetti, and Metz himself in his last work *L'Enonciation Impersonnelle*) and pragmatics (Odin), marks a real development.

There is an early piece by Odin in *Anthology* which seems largely restrained by narratology and the 1970s polarity of dominant/oppositional, but does perk up just before its end by moving on into heterogeneity, variable structures in a language composed of several dialects and the possibility of a system of multiple readings of film.[23] A quite useful section of *Introduction* gives some account of this third period of semiotics, including Odin's seven operations of fictionalization, which Stam lists without comment They seem to allow for spectatorship without disavowal, mobilization of artistic capacities, and emotional experience on one level or another.[24] Semiotics may not be taken up again, perhaps because of its scientistic aspects, perhaps because it has an old-fashioned image, or perhaps it would need to be linked to a dynamic critical or social activity

Stam and Miller do not have a strong sense of periodisation – their inclination is to run the whole century together, with just the implied break at 1960 when proper theory is supposed to have begun. One can find a more sophisticated attempt to separate things out in Bordwell's 'Contemporary film studies and the vicissitudes of grand theory',[25] with its schema of the two linked orthodoxies supposed to have set the tone from about 1975 to 1995 psychoanalytic subject-positioning and social culturalism, and their parallel doctrinal premisses and reasoning methods I am not concerned with this now, but with a less remarked-on idea about periodization advanced by Bordwell in the same piece. Discussing authorship as conceived in the 1950s and 1960s, Bordwell presents it as an interregnum between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' theories By traditional he means montage, realism, and the first phase of filmic specificity and film as art (Arnheim, and so on) By contemporary he means semiotics, structuralism, and what follows (This division is actually the same as the one Stam and Miller make by drawing a line at 1960, but more pronounced)

I think this is the wrong way to conceive of authorship. Far from representing an interregnum – or having a foot in both periods, which is perhaps what Bordwell means – authorship should be linked with genre, structuralism and semiotics as the foundation of contemporary film theory. (The idea which did have a foot in both periods was realism, which was becoming 'realism and anti-realism' under pressure from authorship, mise en scene and structuralism.) The next phase (from 1975, by all means) sees an aberration, with authorship, structuralism and semiotics giving way to psychoanalysis, genre and realism giving ground to ideology, and anti-realism receiving far more attention than realism By the mid 1980s this tide

23 *Anthology* pp 54–66

24 *Introduction* pp 254–55

25 David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (eds) *Post-Theory* (Madison WI Wisconsin University Press, 1996) pp 3–36

is ebbing fast Postmodernism, with its willingness to mix traditional, contemporary and esoteric forms in rapidly modifying technology, offered liberation from the static mechanisms of subject-positioning and the pseudo-politics of ideology. Another effectively new element is narrative, neglected in the traditional and the first contemporary periods, present during psychoanalysis and ideology but very restricted by them And most of the main elements of the founding period of contemporary film theory survived the aberration and could engage with the social and cultural zones proposed by postmodern globalism: authorship as a sophisticated language element, genre as language element and connective principle both within language and between films, audiences and producers Structuralism is perhaps quite diminished, because its focus on binary oppositions has had to give ground to a complicated, varied and multiple sense of differences But the related, if simpler, concept of structure may be a suitable replacement

If psychoanalysis failed because it could not account for pleasure or communication in social or aesthetic terms, a framework of film language might aim to produce such accounts It would have to hold back from any form of language-absolutism and draw strength from critical relations with practical and cultural realities It would, I think, be based on authorship, generic principles, audiences, realism and anti-realism, a semiotics perhaps redeveloped around dialogics and iconicity, the visual and verbal experience of public and private spheres, different kinds of narrative and technological flexibility There is no question of confusing film language with a natural language or a verbal-only language It is a complex entity with emotional affect But it is still a language

review:

Ravi Vasudevan (ed.), **Making Meaning in Indian Cinema.** New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 317 pp.

PRIYA JAIKUMAR

This anthology is a testimonial to the tremendous revitalization of research and scholarship on Indian cinema over the past decade The book combines new essays with important, previously published work, to stage theoretical and historiographical shifts within Indian film analysis in a manner that is relevant to the discipline of Film Studies in general

In this sense, the anthology is significant for several reasons It maps out a critical turn in contemporary Indian film studies, 'to understand the political implications of Indian popular cinema' (p 2) More provocatively, it brings to bear film and social theory to Indian cinematic texts and contexts in a manner that allows the object of analysis not only to be interrogated by its interpretive framework, but also to extend, disturb and reorient the theoretical base To the credit of this anthology, several essays deftly articulate questions regarding intersections between film spectatorship, regimes of viewing and state power, to make interventions in Hollywood-oriented, Euro-American film theory And least overt, though just as intriguing, is the sense in which this book is itself a record of the defining intellectual traditions and agendas of film scholars working on Indian cinema today This is a lively profile of the intellectual who is as committed to theorizing specificity, modes of 'cultural recognition' (p 13) and local idioms of spectatorship as she/he is interested in complicating the reductive binaries of tradition versus modernity, identification versus objectification, critical versus uninformed viewership, or

authority versus resistance by deploying and interrogating apparatus, reception, postcolonial and state theory.

In an excellent introduction, Vasudevan calls this volume an 'exploratory one', with a 'limited spread' that 'has imposed certain boundaries on what is addressed' (p 28). However, it would not be unfair to say that the exclusions, emphases, theoretical or methodological inclinations, and even the bibliographic references and acknowledgments of these essays, are a good index of the terms and forums within which scholarly discussions of Indian cinema are taking place today.

Emerging scholarship is rarely dictated by a self-conscious attempt to represent all historical periods or analytic forms uniformly, and one consequence of this for an anthology of this nature is that the criterion used to organize its eleven essays into four sections is rather arbitrary But the unwieldy division has the retrospective advantage of illuminating unaccommodated gaps and overlaps that, as the editor hopes, can only inspire rather than inhibit further analysis

The first section contains two essays Moving away from an analysis of censorship, Stephen Hughes researches travelling and permanent exhibition spaces in colonial South India as a critical site through which state surveillance both responded to and shaped exhibition practices M S S Pandian intertwines an analysis of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party and its ideology with a reading of popular and political responses to the textually-dense DMK-inspired Tamil film *Parasakthi* (1952), to argue that the film, despite its apparent anti-Brahmanical stand, was in fact a compromise with the 'cultural givens of the Tamil society' (p. 90) Though both essays use archival material, the consideration of the ideological workings of a text in conjunction with state politics makes Pandian's piece more representative of the essays in this anthology. As argued by Hughes, there is clearly room for more work on the spatial and material conditions of viewership (with its attendant questions of access and interpretation for a researcher of early cinema). Additionally, there is a need to consider these findings in relation to our understanding of the commodification of the film industry and spectatorial address

S V. Srinivas's essay, the final one of the anthology, may well be considered in relation to the first two pieces His detailed analysis of fan activity surrounding the popular Telugu star Chiranjeevi illuminates the tenuous relationship between star machinery on the one hand, which makes an individual part of public domain, and state machinery on the other, which is partially premissed on the regulation of privacy This conflict produces 'fans' who are considered 'criminals' or 'rowdy-sheeters' by 'citizens', as the star and his fans constantly struggle with the control and transgression of sanctioned boundaries of fandom (p. 315) The party ideology and electoral considerations discussed in Pandian's essay, the surveillance

of exhibition sites in Hughes's piece, and the fan club activity studied by Srinivas, collectively describe a horizon of forces outside cinematic texts, which crucially shape as well as respond to them.

Essays that devote themselves to close readings of film texts offer an instructively nuanced and complex definition of film genre, style and narrativity, where these are evaluated as the bearers of class, region, caste or gender-based divisions and contradictions. In different ways, Biswas and Vasudevan consider the 'complex mechanisms of articulation' (p 116) of mainstream melodramas of the 1950s, evaluating tropes of the family, couple, social identity or national past, in narratives that produce an imaginary psychic and social space for a popular audience. Kaali's essay on the Tamil Nativity film and Mazumdar's work on Amitabh Bachhan's embodiment of the 'angry man' and Shahrukh Khan's 'psychotic' hero sustain similar readings of narrative and star bodies as conventions or allegories, symptomatic of transitions in the symbolic valence of rural and cityscapes within the national imaginary Interestingly, the angry and psychotic hero of Hindi cinema is primarily read within formal mechanisms of cinematic and national modernity, while Gopalan's reading of the angry, avenging woman foregrounds the complex relationships between sexual difference and viewing pleasure The bracketing of gender in the analysis of masculinity, standing in here for the national body and subjectivity, opens up another area of further study in Indian cinema.

Prasad and Rajadhyaksha's essays explicitly concern themselves with the formulation of a conceptual template for theorizing key vectors of the cinematic apparatus, such as narrativity and spectatorship Here an underlying theme of the anthology stands out in relief, namely the centrality of the democratic postcolonial state apparatus in theorizing multiple articulations of the cinematic apparatus in India Almost reminiscent of the psychoanalytic and linguistic turn taken by film theory in the 1970s subsequent to Metz, Bellour and Baudry, this anthology could be read as marking a paradigmatic shift, in that it labours to create a foundational vocabulary for the study of cinema based on theories of the liberal, democratic, contractual nation-state Highlighted by the editor, though perhaps insufficiently stressed given its striking prevalence in the essays, the state is 'recurrently invoked as a political concept produced by film narrative in the form of emblematic character, the narrative agent, and, perhaps most complicatedly, the imaginary authority involved in the organization of the narrative' (p 14)

Thus, Prasad uses insights from Jameson and Zižek to theorize the breakdown and reformulation of syntagmatic orders in *Damani* and *Roja*, by relating the process to the implied subject's autonomy from, and reinstantiation of, state authority Rajadhyaksha maps a political model onto cinema, arguing that the contract between an 'indigenous, modernist, sovereign' state and its subjects to produce citizens within

a civil society could be considered analogous to the narrative contract of Realism (the privileged mode of civil society), to produce, with the audience, a textual site of meaning premissed on shared 'reading competences' (p 273) Developing a transactional theory of meaning production here, Rajadhyaksha offers a fine reformulation of Mulvey's model of the profilmic, spectatorial and intra-diegetic look in cinema. Revising her argument about the hegemonic role of the third look, the author proposes an 'oscillating movement' (p 292) or relay between the first two looks and the third, to reconsider the dominance and disavowal of the enframed image under different circumstances

As Rajadhyaksha argues, 'the surfacing of the frame coincides with circumstances when it is required that the "actual" viewer be asserted, reconstituted, re-ensconced' (as in Brazil's Cinema Novo of the 1950s [p 292]) while the frame ceases to dominate screened action when 'cinema becomes a more local language', with 'more complex, locally derived, interpellative and identificatory devices' replacing and internalizing the authority of the organizing frame (p 294) Though the essay is too brief to develop the specific ways in which 'interpellative machinery incorporates paradigms from democratic functioning' (p 294), its complex series of arguments about culturally specific aesthetic idioms in conjunction with broader speculations on film spectatorship resonate with other ongoing innovations in film theory. For example, in a recent essay, Miriam Hansen rethinks Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's argument regarding classical Hollywood cinema to ask, 'why and how an aesthetic idiom developed in one country could achieve transnational and global currency' (p 333)?[1] In her answer, she traces dual vectors of 'low' attraction genres and classical realist texts to suggest the contours of a transnational American cinema less beholden to a 'universal narrative idiom' than to a paradoxical 'global sensory vernacular' (p 344)

Film theory arrives at an exciting juncture, as scholars of Hollywood cinema examine its globalized parochialisms and scholars of Indian cinema intervene in theoretical abstractions to make room for its 'localisms' – Rajadhyaksha, for instance, 'outlines a theory of the cinema that can account for the Indian cinema' (p 269) Certainly, as the editor Ravi Vasudevan points out, this anthology privileges 'the political domain of the popular cinema, the ideological dimension of film form' (p 23). Moreover, with the exception of Niranjana and Dhareshwar's treatment of the song-and-dance sequence 'Mukkala Muqabla' in their insightful essay on *Kaadalan*, the essays primarily focus on narrative constructions of the visual Perhaps, to invoke Hansen again, we might consider how Indian cinema participates in multiple 'modes of organizing . sensory perception . . experience and expression, affectivity, temporality, and reflexivity',[2] or we may question the extent to which a theoretical

1 Miriam Hansen The mass production of the senses classical cinema as vernacular modernism' in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds) *Reinventing Film Studies* (London Arnold 2000) pp 332–50

2 Ibid p 333

premiss linking the production of the citizen to the viewer privileges a rationalist model. But this is precisely the point What is exciting about this anthology is that its dynamism opens up new directions in film scholarship